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CHALLENGE OF NEW CHRISTIAN SECTS

Edited by

Kuncheria Pathil

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Challenge of New Christian Sects

Edited by

Kuncheria Pathil

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THIS ISSUE OF JEEVADHARA

IS DEDICATED

TO THE MEMORY OF

GEORGE M. SOARES-PRABHU,

INDIA'S FOREMOST BIBLICAL THEOLOGIAN,

WHO APPRECIATED AND ENCOURAGED JEEVADHARA

BY MAKING SUBSTANTIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO IT

FROM THE BEGINNING

AND LATER

BY TAKING UP THE EDITING OF

ITS BIBLICAL ISSUE.

WE EXPRESS OUR DEEP SORROW

AT HIS SUDDEN DEATH (July 23, 1995)

WHICH IS A GREAT LOSS TO JEEVADHARA

AS WELL AS TO THE CHURCH AT LARGE.

J. CONSTANTINE MANALEL

General Editor

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Editorial

The mushrooming of the New Christian Sects, their evangelistic crusades and the so-called success stories point to a crisis or radical change in the society today. The traditional Christian Churches apparently have failed to take note of and adequately respond to the socio-cultural changes and the emerging new sets of values. A hasty and outright condemnation of these new Christian Sects and their fundamentalistic attitudes may not be the answer. A thorough and objective study of these new Sects and of the social, psychological and religious needs of contemporary humanity which these new Sects promise to fulfill seems to be necessary and urgent. This number of *Jeevadhara* proposes to make such a study on New Christian Sects.

Christian Sects are as old as Christianity. The Early Churches were characterized by enormous diversity, but sometimes this diversity exceeded the limits and amounted to heresy and breach of communion and subsequent formation of heretical Christian Sects. We have included in this number a brief historical survey of the important Christian Sects including some of the early Christian ones, the sectarian movements during the Reformation and some of the well known contemporary Christian Sects. The survey reveals how difficult it is to identify and define a Christian Sect. Sect is a religious and social category which can be described only by its typical characteristics. All the characteristics may not be present in every Sect.

A totally negative approach and condemnation of all Christian Sects caricaturing them as Christian aberrations will not be the correct approach. What requires today is a deeper and scientific study of the new Christian Sects. Psychology, social sciences, cultural anthropology and theology have to join hands in understanding and explaining the new Sects. Two articles are included here to highlight the social and psychological context of these new Sects.

The New Christian Sects have to be taken seriously as they are. They have to be understood from within. We have included here a short article on the Pentecostal Movement written by a young theologian from a Pentecostal Church. We had invited some leaders from the Pentecostal Churches to write their personal witness, but no substantial response came in. However some leaders from the Catholic Charismatic Movement responded and we could include three personal testimonies. The problems the new Christian Sects presuppose, the values they propose and the solutions they provide have to be critically studied by the mainline Churches which are in transition and in need of radical changes.

The Doctrinal Commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India along with the National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre Bangalore is planning to organize a National Consultation on Neo-Pentecostalism and the Challenges and Problems it poses. Hope this present Number of *Jeevadhara* will be a modest contribution towards the immediate preparation of this National Consultation.

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Kuncheria Pathil

The New Christian Sects: A Psychological Perspective

It appears that in the world today anyone with a "vision" and a matching programme can start a new Church or a Christian sect and he will not be short of followers. Involved in this baffling phenomenon is the influence of a variety of psychological factors such as the pull of novelty and change, disillusionment and the quest for truth, the psychodynamics of dissent and division, fierce love of freedom and independence, the pleasure of puritanism, the power of altruism, the personality pattern of followers, the charism of the leader, reactions against Church structures and the skilful use of selling techniques.

The mushrooming of Christian sects

The mushrooming of new Christian sects and movements has become a baffling trend in the modern world. It appears that anyone with a "vision" can start a new church or sect and there will be always people to follow him. In the United States alone, there are close to 300 Christian denominations and sects. While some have a membership of only a few hundred or a few thousand, others have millions as followers. They are today fast multiplying in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Most of the American and European ones are sending their missionaries to the Third World countries in a big way. "Sheep stealing" by the Protestants in certain parts of the world is so intense that the Roman Catholic hierarchies in Brazil and some other Latin American countries are alarmed at the massive exodus of Catholics to various Protestant denominations.

Conflicting doctrines

An anomaly about these churches is that although each sect claims to be the "real" church possessing the whole truth, many of their beliefs and practices are at odds with one another. For instance, while almost all churches uphold the doctrine of the Trinity and believe in the divinity of Jesus, the Unitarians deny the doctrine of the Trinity and reject the divinity of Jesus. They

believe that God exists as one being or one person; God is thus a unity, not a plurality. If the Pentecostals give an all-inclusive emphasis to the Holy Spirit, the Baptists believe that Baptism is the key factor. Some Christian denominations hold the civil governments in great respect and believe that the civil government is by divine appointment; others, however, view the secular authority as a rival power opposed to Christ and His Church. Thus the Jehovah's Witnesses, taking the latter stance, refuse to salute the national flag and refuse to obey certain civil laws that they believe are in conflict with God's laws. Some Churches teach the doctrine of universal salvation or general atonement for all; others, on the other hand, teach the doctrine of limited atonement, stressing God's wrath and the eternal damnation of the wicked. Each sect passionately defends its own practices and doctrines, and sometimes crosses the boundaries of charitable behaviour in attacking the claims of other sects.

Origin in founders' special vision

Many of these movements have their origin in the special charism of an individual, or they may be born out of the private revelations and visions that an individual has had. Some of the small churches like the Swedenborgian Church, the Mariavite Old Catholic Church, the Schwenkfelder Church, the Pentecostal movement called Pillar of Fire, the Theosophical Society, and the Church known as Triumph the Church and Kingdom of God in Christ thus have their origin in the visions and private revelations of their founders. Even a major movement like the Jehovah's Witnesses is the outcome of the special charism of one leading church figure, Charles Taze Russell, and, from 1884 to 1931 they were known chiefly as the Russelites. The Swedenborgian Church was organized out of the New Revelation contained in the teachings of the distinguished 18th century Swedish scientist and theologian, Emmanuel Swedenborg who believed that he was commissioned by God to teach the new doctrines. The Mariavite Old Catholic Church has its origin in the private revelations received by Mother Maria Franciszka, a Roman Catholic religious superior general, in the late 19th century in Poland. The Schwenkfelder Church was founded in Silesia by Caspar Schwenckfeld Von Ossig following his spiritual enlightenment in the early 16th century. The Pillar of Fire movement had its origin in 1901 in the zeal and special charism

of its founder, Mrs. Alma White, the wife of a Methodist minister in Colorado, U. S. A. The Theosophical movement was started by the Russian born Helena Petrovna Blavatsky in the second half of the 19th century. The Triumph the Church and Kingdom of God in Christ was founded in the U. S. A. in the early 20th century by E. D. Smith for spreading his vision of Christianity. It appears that when someone with a charism has a vision and a programme, there will always be some people flocking around him. The result, almost always, is the organization of a new church or sect.

The psychodynamics of dissent and division

Anyone who wants to understand the origin and development of various Christian groups should also make an effort to go into the psychodynamics of dissent and division and the sequels to real or imaginary persecution. Behind the origin of most new groups and movements is the utter frustration of some members or a section of the group with the existing system or the accepted doctrine and the raging desire to break away from the original Church in order to try something new, something "better". The root causes for the origin of mainline Protestantism itself are to be found in frustration, anger, revolt, power struggle, prevalent corruption, real or imaginary persecution, the spirit of dissent and reaction. While men like Erasmus and Savonarola attempted to reform the Roman Catholic Church from within, people like Martin Luther, openly rebelled against the system, attempting to topple it from within and without. Likewise, most of the new Churches originated as the result of protest against the mother Churches. Some leaders emerge, bringing the reactionaries and protesters under one banner. The result would be the birth of a new Church or sect. In course of time, disputes arise again, or personality clashes occur, leading to further fragmentation.

Historically, divisions occurred in Churches and new Churches emerged when there was a rift within the Church on doctrinal or other issues. It is not uncommon to see Churches splitting into two when the community is divided on some significant contemporary issue. The major split of the Baptists in 1845, over the issue of slavery, into Southern Baptists and Northern Baptists is a clear case of social, ethical, and political issues dividing a community. Over the issue of slavery and the Civil War, the

Southerners left the mother Church in 1845 and organized themselves into the Southern Baptist Convention.

The causes of the great division of Christianity into the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Churches, which culminated in mutual excommunications of the Patriarch and the Pope are more complex than the causes of the Baptist split. The Roman-Eastern split had its roots not merely in theological differences but also in ecclesiastical jealousies, personal rivalries, and political ambitions. The high-handed manner in which the Roman Church settled issues, leaving no room for dialogue or compromise, forced the Orthodox Churches to rebel and seek freedom from the hegemony and suzerainty of Rome. When national sentiments crept in, the Orthodox Churches further organized themselves on national lines, such as the Greek, Russian, Syrian, Romanian, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, and Serbian. Besides, the gulf between the East and the West in such matters as race, language, social customs, thought patterns, and the social milieu made it difficult for each camp to understand or appreciate the stance of the other. If, for centuries, Eastern Orthodoxy and Western Catholicism have viewed each other with hatred and suspicion, one has to realize that the underlying factors contributing to this phenomenon are numerous and multifaceted. In other words, *situational determinants* have played a key role in the emergence of many Christian groups and sects.

The conscious and unconscious desire to guide the destiny of one's own people and one's own Church independent of the interferences of a supreme authority like that of the Pope must be a crucial factor that motivates the Patriarchs of the East to shun moves toward unity, as they are psychologically prone to retain the sense of independence and autonomy and the power to control the destiny of their own Churches and people.

Unrelenting love of freedom and independence

Many Churches are the natural and inevitable outcome of their followers' fierce love of freedom and independence. The Reformation itself was the final outburst of this cry for freedom, this longing for independence. The founders of most Protestant denominations consider themselves as "champions of freedom for faith and conscience". It was John Calvin's thirst for it that forced him to revolt against the rigid, suffocating structure of the Roman Catholic Church which ultimately led to his fleeing to

Geneva as a fugitive. The Baptists in the United States are well known for their policy of freedom of thought and worship. Each Baptist local congregation has complete freedom and autonomy in matters like worship, preaching, and other aspects of Church life. In England, the Presbyterian Assembly of 1643-1648 resolved to have "no bishop, and no king", and the same Assembly fought tooth and nail against the compulsory use of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer.

Another Christian sect which allows a great amount of freedom in belief and in interpreting dogma and the Scriptures is the Unitarian Church in the United States. Democratic rather than authoritarian principles are upheld in all matters of belief and practice in this Church. Rather than being confined to the strictures of rigid orthodoxy members of this Church are encouraged to enjoy all freedom, provided they stay within the wider parameters of the ideological framework of the Church. This general principle is applicable both to the clergy and the laity. Similarly, the acclaimed policy of the new Unitarian Universalist Association is that no minister, member, or congregation "shall be required to subscribe to any particular interpretation of religion, or to any particular religious belief or creed".

The pull of novelty and change

There are those who are always on the look out for novelty and change. Bored with the traditional and the familiar and disillusioned with the current system and doctrine they are inclined toward seeking the excitement and thrill of what the new and the different have to offer.

Thus some people saw a great "discovery" and a new ground for novelty in the Protestant doctrine that the Scriptures constitute the only basis for faith and practice. Many were attracted by the Baptists' rejection of infant baptism as unscriptural. Others heroically defended the concept of the separation of Church and State. The "Jehovah's Witnesses", which has become quite a phenomenon in the contemporary religious arena with active missionary work in more than 200 countries, has its own unique beliefs and strategies. They have introduced many new, fascinating doctrines that have captured the attention of a large number of people and have succeeded in keeping them under their hypnotic influence. Their *witnessing* and *faith testimony* are

impressive to many believers. They give Biblical justification to all their beliefs and practices such as the absence of separation into clergy and laity, the refusal to use titles like "Reverend", and so on.

Instances of "innovation" in doctrine and practice can be found in the case of many other Churches. The North American Old Roman Catholic Church, organized by the Old Catholic Church Bishop Carmel Henry Carfora, follows the Roman Catholic line in most respects, but it refuses to accept papal infallibility and permits its clergy to marry although officially it recommends celibacy for its priests. Thus matters are made "simple" for them. Another fine example of novelty in thinking and practice is offered by the Pentecostal Churches. Their testimony that is Pentecostal in nature, the great emphasis given to Baptism of the Holy Spirit, the hope induced by their teaching of the premillennial return of Christ, etc., are greatly appealing to many. Their main thrust is achieving individual perfection and holiness, and the Pentecostal experience is a key factor since it is viewed as a sign of God's favour and one's own growth in holiness. To those who have lost interest in the traditional teachings of Roman Catholicism, such novel ideas and practices may seem worth a try. Besides, most Pentecostal groups are vehemently fundamentalistic in doctrine and life. It provides these Churches with all the "fringe benefits" of a fundamentalist group. Those who have a natural disposition to embrace fundamentalism will be also attracted to it. Through their preaching and faith testimonies they over and again proclaim the essential elements of the Pentecostal faith. When these messages are thrust into the hearts and minds of people relentlessly and incessantly, the hearers become "mesmerized" and are led to join these groups to escape from eternal damnation and merit for them eternal bliss. Once they join these groups, they continue to be under the spell of the same mesmerism induced by fiery preachings and electrifying faith testimonies and become active missionaries themselves. As a matter of fact, the mission policy and indoctrination strategy of the aggressively missionary groups like the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Pentecostals is nothing but "coersive persuasion" which is itself a reformed, civilized form of mild brainwashing.

Some sects make liberal use of innovations and democratizations that are appealing to the democratically-minded moderns.

For example, the Plymouth Brethren (also known as the Christian Brethren), take seriously the Biblical words related to the "priesthood of all believers". Hence they have an unstructured Communion service, called the "remembrance meeting", held weekly, in which all men of the assembly are permitted to take oral part. Of course the Brethren have preachers who serve the congregation full-time. However, the preacher will not be in charge of the service, nor is he given the designation "clergy". The Brethren adopt the stance that as far as the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper is concerned, it does not make a difference whether it is administered by an ordained minister or a lay person, and they give Scriptural evidence showing that the presence of ordained ministers is not necessary in the breaking of bread. It is worth noting that the Brethren's emphasis on shared leadership and participatory worship has been greatly appealing to many a modern. In another development that is in tune with the thinking of moderns, some Churches reject the concept of eternal punishment and damnation on the ground that it is incompatible with the concept of an all-loving, all-merciful, and all-powerful God. Basing themselves on the teachings of such Church Fathers as Gregory of Nyssa, Clement of Alexandria and so on, they affirm the doctrine of universal salvation. The Spiritualists attract a large number of people. They have a doctrinal system that borders on the realm of the queer, the odd, and the magical. Tens of thousands have been attracted to this sect because of the curiosity and novelty factor involved in their psychic experiments. Communication with the departed, clairvoyance, table tipping, and spirit rappings are standard procedures of the Spiritualists. Apart from this, the Spiritualists also have a very rational approach to the Supreme Being and a superstition-free system for the human's relationship with this Supreme Being. Their conception of God as "Infinite Intelligence", their teaching that the highest morality is contained in the Golden Rule, and their cardinal principle and central teaching that "God is love" make Spiritualism extremely appealing to those believers who have a rationalistic and humanistic bend of mind.

In addition to the positive pull of the above factors, millions have left the Roman Catholic Church to join other more "popular" sects over controversial issues such as contraception and abortion,

divorce and remarriage, women's ordination, priestly celibacy and papal infallibility.

Apt use of selling techniques

The phenomenal growth of some of the new sects and movements need not always be the result of purely spiritual motivation or the intrinsic worth of the sect in question. Rather, it could be because the sect knows well how to "sell" itself to the public. Hence, one cannot rule out the involvement of psychological and propaganda factors in the growth of a sect. Many groups, exploiting the situational changes, capture members from other Churches with the skilful use of "selling techniques". The "sheep stealing", so common in recent times in the Latin American countries, probably belongs to this category. The American Unitarian Universalist Church, for example, financially supports and encourages liberal religious groups in 65 countries throughout the world. Their indoctrination programmes are well-organized and efficient, their religious education programme is rated as among the best in the whole United States. Similarly, the "Back to God Hour" radio programme of the Christian Reformed Church in North America is well known. This programme is broadcast from various stations in the U. S. and other countries and reaches five continents. The televangelists make an excellent use of the amazing potential of the visual medium through their continuous telecasts. In addition, most of the aggressively missionary Churches distribute their literature in unbelievably large numbers. *The Watchtower*, the official journal of the Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, has a circulation of more than 13 million. The number of Bibles, books, and pamphlets they have distributed since 1920 is more than 100 crores, and these are printed and published in about 180 languages. About three and a half million Witnesses are engaged in this work all over the world.

Among the Seventh-day Adventists, tithing is strictly followed. In addition to tithing, they give very generously to support the Church's various other needs and missionary activity. In the U. S., their per capita contribution is one of the highest among Christian groups. All this money is being used effectively for the spread and growth of the sect. For instance, they conduct about 5000 weekly radio and television programmes in 80 languages throughout the world. The number of students enrolled in their

Bible correspondence programmes is more than six million. Their international programme, "The Voice of Prophecy" is broadcast from over 1000 stations each week; their two TV programmes, "Faith for Today", and "It is Written", are seen in about 200 outlets.

Personality pattern of the followers

In general, those who follow these sects will have in common certain personality traits. For instance, only those with a particular personality pattern will get the gift of tongues. That is to say, one has to be suggestive, and should have unquestioning, deep faith and the willingness and ability for self-surrender. Members of most of these sects, especially the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Pentecostals and the Seventh-day Adventists have shown remarkable endurance in the face of ridicule and persecution. In the early periods of their founding, the Seventh-day Adventists had to face a great deal of derision and hostility from others. Following the letter and spirit of Acts 5: 29 ("... We must obey God rather than any human authority") the Jehovah's Witnesses have consistently refused to obey the laws of secular governments if they are in conflict with the laws of God. Naturally, they have had to endure the wrath of the secular powers. Amazingly, however, the Witnesses have endured every type of punishment and torture including stonings, whippings, the burning of their homes and assault on them by mobs — heroically, and in a spirit of joyful endurance and peaceful submission reminiscent of the faith and endurance of the early Christian martyrs. The Witnesses also show remarkable generosity in giving their time and money for the spread of their faith, and so are members of most other new sects. Obviously, only those with certain personality traits and a particular personality pattern can fit into the matrix of the doctrine and practice of these sects.

The truth-seekers

Some people are, by nature, truth-seekers. They are constantly on the search for "truth". The "truth" they seek need not necessarily be what is objectively true, but it must be a "truth" that will satisfy them. These truth-seekers finally find in the teachings and practices of a particular Church what they have been looking for. And the new sects, on their part, do everything they can to convince the would be followers that they are the real Church. They parade Biblical evidence for every "truth" they

preach. That remarkable modern religious phenomenon, the Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, subscribe to many such "truths". Some of these are nothing more than "beliefs of convenience", such as the belief that Jesus' heavenly rule began in 1914, that He came to the Temple of Jehovah in 1918, and that Jesus, reigning as King and Lord in the Temple, started sending out his missionaries in 1919 to preach and spread His Kingdom. Each of these sects claims that its beliefs and teachings have a Scriptural basis and so are free from error. They scorn all other teachings and beliefs and reject them as erroneous. Since they believe that they have the monopoly of truth, most of these sects turn a deaf ear to counter arguments and evidence.

The role of leaders

The founders and leaders of these sects play a significant role both in the origin and the later development of these sects. Usually they are men of conviction and charisms and are capable of attracting people to them. Take, for example, the case of the Jehovah's Witnesses. The movement came into being solely owing to the towering personality and genius of one man, Charles Taze Russell. Incorporated in 1884, the Witnesses were known for the next fifty years as Russelites. Through thick and thin Russell led the organization until his death in 1916. Joseph F. Rutherford was at the helm of the organization from 1916 until his death in 1942. Nathan H. Knorr was president of the organization from 1942 to 1977. On Knorr's death in 1977, Frederick W. Franz took over the presidentship of the organization. Thus just four very powerful leaders have steered the affairs of the organization in an impressive manner for over 110 years. Their hold on the organization was so tight and their influence so captivating that each one of them reigned as a king, unchallenged and well-accepted, until they breathed their last. Huge crowds flocked to hear Russell's lectures and sermons. More than 13 million copies of Russell's books have been circulated. It is said that it was Russell's books and lectures that made the movement such a remarkable modern religious phenomenon. Judge Rutherford also was a great organizer and a prolific writer of the Witnesses' religious literature.

In the case of the Pillar of Fire, power was concentrated in the hands of the founder and her descendants. Mrs. White, the

founder, was the organization's first bishop. After her death, her two sons controlled the organization. After the mother and her two sons, it was the turn of the grand-daughter. Mrs. White's grand-daughter, Bishop Arlene White Lawrence, wielded supreme power in the organization until 1984.

The 'Pleasure' of puritanism

Certain groups are very puritanical and ascetic, and people who have a bend toward a rigid and scrupulous lifestyle readily join these groups. The emphasis of certain churches on perfection, holiness, baptism, the Pentecostal experience, a life of separation from the world, firm belief in the literal inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible etc. makes its members assume a "holier-than-thou" attitude which provides them the 'pleasure' of pride, prejudice, 'achievement', and superiority. For example, when the Jehovah's Witnesses refuse to salute the national flag on the grounds that these are expressions of the devil and so subtle forms of idolatry, it provides them the joy of having done something that is pleasing to the Lord. Some Churches have a very strict code of behaviour. The Holiness code of the United Pentecostal Church International, for instance, forbids such things as home television sets, worldly amusements, cutting of women's hair, immodest dress, and mixed bathing. Members with a puritanical bend of mind do not resent such codes; rather, they are conscientiously honest in following these rules because it gives them a sense of accomplishment and superiority.

The power of altruism

Altruism and genuine Christian charity are among the surest means to prove the credibility and authenticity of a Church before God as well as in the eyes of humans. For that matter, a number of Christian groups and communities vie with one another in practising Christian charity and altruism. They feed the hungry, clothe the poor, and teach the illiterate. They care for the sick, the orphan, the elderly, and the widow. The Salvation Army, for instance, puts up a noble example in this field. Although it has only about 1.5 million members, the Salvation Army, with its 25,000 officers not only proclaims the Word of God in about 90 countries and in 130 languages, but also runs more than 5,000 service centres outside the U.S. It includes hospitals, schools, feeding centres, adult rehabilitation centres, homes for unwed mothers, and other

institutions for a variety of social and humanitarian programmes. In the U. S. itself the Army has more than 6,000 service centres and 5,000 officers to run these, assisted by several thousand employees. The Army serves people of every race, creed, colour, and nationality, and it raises its own funds to provide these services. Another group well-known for its humanitarian activities is the Unitarian Universalist Association in the U. S. A. Right from the beginning, this Church showed a keen sense of social responsibility. They opposed slavery, worked for prison reforms and for improvement in the condition of working women, worked for the betterment of refugees and deprived children, and did a variety of other services to improve the lot of the poor and the deprived human beings. A good number of genuine people are attracted by such selfless altruistic behaviour and join these Churches, evolving a distinct identity for themselves and finding fulfilment in it.

Warmth and cohesiveness of small groups

One should not lose sight of the role of other psychological factors like the need for acceptance and affiliation, the need for experiencing emotional warmth etc. Thus, those who are marginalized and alienated in the main church leave that church and seek acceptance, comfort, solace, warmth and affiliation in the cohesiveness and family atmosphere prevailing in the new sects and cults. A major strength of the small, new groups is their cohesiveness. It may also arise from inferiority feelings, hatred of outgroups, fear, feelings of insecurity and oppression etc. Behind the unity and cohesiveness of many small groups is the members' realization of the wisdom contained in the maxim: "United we stand, divided we fall."

Cathartic effects

The cathartic effects such as of singing in groups, the warmth provided by affiliation to cohesive groups, and the emotionalism of faith testimonies and witnessing and healing sessions are a source of great solace to many people who are otherwise disturbed and dejected and seek comfort and consolation in the "magic" of religion. Whereas outsiders distrust such sentimentalism, to the members of the group this sort of emotional catharsis is itself an unconscious aim and an end in itself. One of the reasons for the rapid growth of Pentecostalism is the Cathartic

effects and the emotionalism involved in its way of preaching, praying, witnessing, and living.

Conclusion

The mushrooming of Christian groups and sects and the phenomenal growth of some of them may appear to be a puzzling, even alarming, trend. However, one has to understand that involved here is the influence of a variety of factors including some powerful psychological ones. In this context, one should not ignore the influence of the new social, psychological, and political climate that encourages freedom and independence, variety and novelty, pluralism and tolerance. In one sense, the mushrooming of sects is itself a byproduct of the democratic way of thinking and living. The belief that truth is nobody's monopoly, and the new emphasis on pluralism and tolerance, are two of democracy's major contributions that have shaped the modern way of thinking and living. Whether the current developments, as seen in the mushrooming of sects and movements, reflect a healthy trend or not will always remain a disputed question.

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Jose Thadavanal

The Challenge of the Pentecostal Churches Today: an Insider's View

The author is a member of the Pentecostal Church in Kerala, and is at present a Doctoral Candidate in Theology at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore. Any objective understanding and critical evaluation of the New Christian Sects such as Neo-Pentecostalism, requires first of all, a sympathetic listening to the members of these groups and movements. As an insider the author makes a summary presentation on the origin and growth of Pentecostalism, its salient features, beliefs and practices, and their message to the main line Churches.

Introduction

The Pentecostals are usually regarded by the mainline churches as a sect or cult. They hardly accept the contribution of the Pentecostal churches. Though many of the theologians talk loudly and proudly about wider ecumenism, they do not want to include the Pentecostals as they look upon them as sectarians.

Whatever might be the allegations, the Pentecostals are christians with some distinctive characteristics. They claim that their teachings are rooted in the Bible. Though all Pentecostals do not hold the same doctrines and practices, they have a lot of commonalities. The speaking in tongues is one of the distinctive common element for all Pentecostal denominations. (In India we have Indian Pentecostal Church of God, Church of God in India, Assemblies of God, Sharon Fellowship and a wide variety of other Pentecostal Penominations.)

It is true that the Pentecostal churches have raised a tremendous amount of challenge today. They act as a corrective and dynamic force in the christian church. The faith, the practice and the very nature of the Pentecostal churches have a very special relevance and challenge for today.

I. Pentecostalism : origin and development

The attempt here is to provide a brief history of pentecostal movement. The Pentecostals trace back their origin to the day of

pentecost (Lk. 24: 49; Acts. 2). The glossolalia (speaking in tongues) is acknowledged by the Pentecostals as the distinctive experience along with the gift of prophecy, miracles, healing and visions. These phenomena are found all through the centuries. Irenaeus (130 AD — 202 AD) writes, "we have in the church many brethren who have the prophecy and speaking various kinds of tongues through the spirit".¹ Tertullian (3rd century) also testified that glossolalia was found in the Montanist church which he had joined.² The Pentecostal movement is also understood as an off-shoot of the 'Holiness Movement'.

The modern pentecostal movement began from the Azusa street (United States) event. According to Vinson Synan, "In January 1901, one of Parham's students, an eighteen year old girl named Agnes Ozman, was baptised in the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the spirit gave utterance".³ It is observed that Charles Parham holds the basic teachings of the Holiness movement. They are justification by faith, sanctification and the divine healing and the pre-millennial second advent of Jesus Christ.⁴ Parham was a former Methodist Minister, and he had started a healing home in Topeka where he invited the students to study the Scripture. This Bible School had the privilege to witness to the 'fire' of the modern Pentecostal movement.

In India, the Pentecost revival began in 1905 at Pandita Ramabai's Mukti Mission in Maharashtra. There were also other pioneers of Pentecostal revival in India. They are A. G. Gar (U. S. A.), Christian Schumacher (U.S.A) and Thomas Barrett (Norway). In the state of Kerala also the Pentecostal movement spread like a violent storm and people from different faiths have joined the movement.

Today, the Pentecostal movement is recognized by the world christian bodies, including the World Council of Churches as a significant movement. It was calculated in 1985 that over ten percent of all the christians in the world were of Pentecostal or

1 Quoted from *Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. 5* (Charles Scribners sons, 1885, p. 53) in *The Pentecostal Church. A History and Popular Survey*. By Elmer Lewis Moon, New York: Carlton Press, 1966, p. 6.

2 Elmer Lewis Moon. *The Pentecostal Church: A History and Popular Survey*, New York, Carlton Press, 1966, p. 7.

3 In his introduction in the book *Azusa Street* by Frank Bartleman, New Jersey: Logos International, 1980, p. X.

4 *Ibid.*, p. ix.

charismatic type.⁵ David Barrett, a church growth scholar is of the opinion that at the end of this century the Pentecostals and charismatics will become fifteen percent of world christians.⁶ The Pentecostal churches are growing at a tremendous pace in South Korea and Latin America. According to Peter Wagner, three out of every four protestants today in Latin America are Pentecostals.⁷

II. The important features, faith and practices of the Pentecostal Churches

Now, we will look at the salient features, the doctrinal statements and practices of the Pentecostal churches.

1. The salient features

The Pentecostals uphold the importance of unity, fraternity and holiness. The non-conformism is an important feature of Pentecostalism. They challenge the theology and practices of traditional churches. The Pentecostal church is a free church. They have a critical look at the other religious traditions. According to Steve Durasoff, "what makes them Pentecostal christians is their earnest desire to recapture the early practices of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth".⁸ They believe in the spiritual gifts (especially prophecy and healing).⁹

While discussing the theology and ethics of Pentecostalism Dr. Franklyn Balasundaram brings out the following things, 1) A second Blessing to be taught and received after conversion, 2) believers must seek the spirit's guidance in all their life, 3) believers ought to expect the imminent return of Christ, 4) Christians should shun the world including things such as luxuries, cosmetics, jewellery (but jewellery is not included by all Pentecostal groups), amusement, alcohol and tobacco.¹⁰

5 Vinson Synan. *The Twentieth - Century Pentecostal Explosion*, Florida: creation House, 1987, p. 12.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

7 Peter Wagner. *Spiritual Power and Church Growth*, Florida: Strang Communications Company, 1986, p. 27.

8 *Bright Wind of the Spirit*, New Jersey: Logos International, 1972, p. 3.

9 *Ibid.*, pp. 1-5.

10 "The Voice and Voices" *In Bangalore Theological Forum*, December 1989 and March 1990, p. 102-103.

The aspect of sin and its consequences are given utmost emphasis by the Pentecostals in their preaching. They preach with enthusiasm. The eschatological emphasis is another feature of their preaching. Pentecostal churches entertain people from all castes and religious traditions. True repentance is demanded from those who would like to join the church. The Pentecostals advocate a simple life style.

2. The faith and practices

The following are the common beliefs and practices of the church.

a. *The Scripture*

The Pentecostals accept the sixty six books (O. T., 39; N. T. 27) as the Sacred scripture. It is accepted as the only authoritative book. It is inerrant and infallible. It is the inspired book. Pentecostals keep the place of the Bible above all other scriptures. The non-Biblical scriptures (including Apocryphal books) are not authentic for Pentecostals.

b. *Trinity*

Pentecostals believe in the Triune God — God, the Father; God, the Son; and God, the Holy Spirit. They are one in essence, co-equal, and exist in three persons. Pentecostals believe in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ and the atonement through His vicarious death on the cross. They believe in the incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension and the second coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus is for them the only saviour (Acts. 4: 12) and the only mediator (1 Tim. 2: 5). They reject the mediatorship of Mary and other holy humans. The immaculate idea that is attributed to Mary is also against Pentecostal theology.

c. *Repentance / Salvation*

Pentecostal theology accepts the fact that the human was created in the image of God, but has violated God's commandment and is now under eternal condemnation. But the atoning sacrifice of Christ provides room for restoration. Pentecostals give utmost importance to repentance. The confessing of sins and acknowledging Christ as the personal saviour (Rom. 10: 10) is understood as fundamental for anyone to achieve salvation. Christ is the way to eternal life, and only the one who has faith in him can attain salvation. For Pentecostal theology, neither the good works nor the rituals will help to achieve salvation.

d. *Baptism*

The Pentecostals reject the infant baptism and sprinkling baptism. They find them as unbiblical. Baptism is given only to the believing adults by immersion. It is received by Pentecostals in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Baptism is to unite and to identify with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

e. *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*

The filling of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues is the distinctive mark of a Pentecostal. Speaking in tongues is the foremost sign of the baptism of the Spirit (Acts. 2). The Pentecostals see it as a continuing experience. Quoting the Bible (1 Cor. 13), they argue that one who speaks in tongues is speaking to God, and it edifies.

f. *The Eschatology*

Pentecostals believe in the second coming of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the great tribulation, the final judgment, millennium and the new heaven and the new earth. They take them literally and not as symbolic. The praying for the dead and the concept of purgatory are rejected by Pentecostals.

g. *The Sacraments*

Baptism and the Eucharist are the most important sacraments for Pentecostals. The Lord's supper is celebrated to commemorate the atoning death of Christ. They believe in consubstantiation and reject the theory of transubstantiation. Ordination is given to those who are set apart for ministry. This is given by the leaders of the church by laying on of hands.

h. *The Worship*

The Pentecostal worship is not very ritualistic or liturgical. It is spontaneous in character. It is free worship. There would be clapping of hands, shouting Hallelujah, speaking in tongues, prophecy and sharing of testimony in the Pentecostal worship. They also pray and sing aloud. Breaking the bread and the preaching of the word are given foremost importance in Pentecostal worship.

i. *The Ministers/Ministry*

The ministers of the church include the Apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers and evangelists (Eph. 4:11). The head of the

church is usually called the president. The terms like 'Bishop', 'episcopa', 'metropolitan' are not used by Pentecostals. The Pentecostal churches do not accept the papal authority and his infallibility.

The ministry is associated with the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12: 14). The preaching, teaching, prophecy, healing, pastoral care and evangelism are the main ministries among Pentecostals. Evangelization is recognized as the supreme task of the church (Acts. 1: 8; Mt. 28: 16-20). The salvation through Jesus Christ alone is the key theme of the evangelistic preaching. They try to prove that what they teach or preach from the Bible is the absolute truth. This claim may be criticized as fundamentalism by other churches and people of other faiths. It is of course, an ideological encounter, and Pentecostals are pacifists; so they do not involve in any power-encounter. Hence this attitude cannot be compared to Fascism or Nazism.

One of the main strengths of their ministry is their house visitation. The Pentecostals visit the houses of christians and non-christians, and provide care and guidance to the people in their problems. They also share the message of Good News to the people. This enables many to come to know Christ. The Pentecostals are zealous in organizing street preaching and in distributing pamphlets.

III. Pentecostal Churches and their challenges today

This section would concentrate on the challenge of the Pentecostal churches today. It is easy to criticize, but difficult to study objectively any phenomenon. It is important for the episcopal churches to have an indepth study of Pentecostalism, since it is not an insignificant movement today.

The Pentecostal churches have a message of transformation. This message is applied to christians and non-christians. Their message of repentance urges the drunkards, smokers, and those who involve in sin (sexual immorality, bribery, murder, exploitation etc.) to change their attitude. Their change of life-style enables the society also to transform.

The Pentecostal churches are open to all. People from different religious, racial and social background could come to the church. It is a non-hierarchical, non-ritualistic and non-authoritarian and free church tradition. This kind of structure will enhance freedom and participation for the laity and clergy in the worship and ministry of the church. It is a challenge to the hierarchical and authoritarian churches.

The Pentecostal churches give utmost importance to the Bible. The preaching and teaching is rooted in the Bible. Their theological perspectives are crystal clear. These are taught with authority and certainty. Providing convincing Biblical proof is one of the main characteristics of Pentecostals. These factors are also a great challenge.

The preaching of the Pentecostals are very much linked with the problems of the people which are existential and social. It is very much contextual. The Pentecostal preachers use examples and symbols from the present context, which have a great deal of appeal to the common people. The preaching always leads the people to renewal and commitment. The themes such as cross, hope, peace and comfort, in the preaching attract many. The people find the simple and enthusiastic preaching as attractive and meaningful for their life. It is a challenge to the dry preaching.

The pastoral care plays a very dominant role in the Pentecostal communities. The prayer, fellowship aspect, and the brotherhood are quite alive in the Pentecostal churches. The element of real 'Koinonia' helps the members to be bound together in love. It is said that pastoral care is lacking in many communities, especially in the mainline churches. The Pentecostal congregations are comparatively small, and this helps the pastors to take care of the spiritual well-being of the people more meaningfully.

The exercise of charismatic gifts is another dominant factor. They believe in faith-healing. They also have visions, revelations and prophecy. The fasting and prayer for the sick and those who have complicated problems are common among Pentecostal churches. It is a fact that deliverance through prayer is found for the diseases like cancer and the cases like snake bite or rabbies.

The extreme kind of confidence or faith in God is also a strength of Pentecostalism.

Conclusion

The readers may feel that the author of this article is quite simplistic and not objective. Of course, the topic is dealt in a simple manner. But the treatment of the subject is not very subjective. The attempt is to portray what is going on in the Pentecostal churches—its theology, practices and the main features. The critics may speculate more about Pentecostalism, but it is a fact that nothing is mysterious in Pentecostalism. Pentecostalism brings a tremendous amount of challenge to the theology, practices, ministry, structure and nature of the church.

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M. Stephen

Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement as a Response to Neo-Pentecostalism: a Personal Witness

Professor C. C. Alicekutty of Mercy College, Palakkad, narrates her first encounter with the Catholic Charismatic Movement and how it changed her prayer life, deepened her commitment to Jesus and her fellow humans and her profession of educating the youth. As an unmarried single woman she has discovered that she has a specific vocation in the Church.

It was quite accidental that I joined a Charismatic retreat at Christ Hall, Calicut in June 1976. I was attending a National Seminar for AICUF animators at Thiruppathur. Fr. Fio Mascarenhas S. J. one of the participants, after singing a few songs to my tape for recording, told me 'If you want more songs, come to the Charismatic retreat at Christ Hall'. I had never heard about Charismatic retreats before and had no idea of what it was all about. Being conducted by Fr. Fio, I knew (from my acquaintance with him as a person) it would be a good programme, and I registered my name. Also I informed two of my best friends and teachers, Srs. Cleopatra and Chris of Vimala College, where I did my B. A. and M. A. in English Litt. All the three of us reached Christ Hall and attended the retreat preached by Frs. Fio and Rufus Pereira of Bombay. It was an introduction to a new world of experience to me. The singing, sharings, talks, adoration ... everything was so lively, rich and experiential. The talks, on the Holy Spirit, Charisms and gifts with personal testimony, impressed me. The preachers told us that they were ready to pray over us for a fresh gift of the Holy Spirit in us. I knew I did not have sufficient preparation to receive the Holy Spirit and I decided not to go for prayer. I remained before the Blessed Sacrament in the Chapel, reading the last discourses of Jesus from John's Gospel Chapters 14 to 16, where we read much about the Holy Spirit. Srs. Chris and Cleopatra, after being prayed over, came and sat on either side of me, and encour-

aged me to go for prayer. At last I went. While praying, I received the 'gift of TONGUES' (so strange and totally unexpected an experience!) which was a tremendous rich experience to me, convincing me that I have really received the Holy Spirit! It was a transforming experience to me.

Though I felt I had a religious vocation, I did not feel happy to join any of the existing religious congregations. The retreat experience gave me an assurance, a greater confidence and a richer meaning to my life as a single person 'living in the world but not of the world'.

My parents are quite prayerful and committed Catholics and we were brought up in a very spiritual atmosphere. We, the children, were all actively involved in the pious associations and parish Catechetics etc. I was an active member of the AICUF during my student life and even afterwards. A new depth and richness came to my spiritual life with the retreat. I started sharing my retreat experience with my relations and friends. Like A. G. Gardiner who wanted to put everyone 'in glasses' when he got back his broken specs repaired, I wanted everyone to make a Charismatic retreat! It was after the charismatic renewal experience that I joined Mercy College, Palakkad as a Lecturer in the Department of English. I went about sharing with people, praying to God, and contacting persons concerned for arranging retreats in our parish and our college. Within a year, I succeeded: Fr. Jose Palatty C. M. I. and team gave a retreat in our parish. (Seven members from our family including my brother and sister-in-law from Tumkur) attended it. Fr. Fio and team from Bombay came to give the first Charismatic retreat in Mercy College which was attended by a few of our students, and staff members from our college and some other colleges. Late Sr. Azeria of happy memories, the then Principal, was instrumental in arranging it. For several years, thanks to Sr. Chrisantha our founder Principal, we had annual Charismatic retreats for our staff and students.

My brother who was in Bombay at that time, serving in the Air Force, also came to Charismatic renewal experience through our correspondence and his personal contact with Fr. Fio and others. Retiring from service after eighteen years, he became the first Director of Emmaus—Kerala Catholic Charismatic Renewal Centre—and served there for 7 years. Now he is functioning as

an Animator to Jesus Youth — the youth wing of the KCCR (Kerala Catholic Charismatic Renewal). He has been a tremendous support to me throughout.

Like St. Paul, let me also boast a bit: I have had the opportunity to be involved with the Renewal activities in Kerala from the very beginning. I was a member of the first Kerala Service Team and have been on the National Advisory Council to the NST from the very beginning (i.e., 1978). I served as a member of the NST for 2 terms. Even now I continue fully involved with the Regional and National Renewal activities. This involvement is a very fulfilling experience to me. Through the Charismatic renewal my Catholic identity has become very meaningful and church participation quite active. I am actively involved in the Parish, Diocesan, Regional and National Church life. For a term I was a member of the National Advisory Council to the CBCI, as the lay representative of the St. Thomas Church in Kerala! (An incredible recognition to a catholic woman. My membership on the CCI (Catholic Council of India) still continues). I understand that my charismatic renewal experience has not made me an exclusively branded “Charismatic” with a peculiar spirituality. Praise God!

One area where I am so grateful to the Lord and proud of my involvement is the building up of the unmarried single women in the Kerala Church. We are convinced that this is a vocation in the Church the Lord is renewing, quite relevant and needed in today's world. We have met many persons remaining single, by chance or by choice, due to many reasons and circumstances, without realizing this state as a vocation from God. We try to bring them together, encouraging them to form themselves into some kind of fellowship or community, thus helping them to live a joyful and fruitful witnessing life. The past ten years' effort in this area has succeeded in bringing an awareness on the part of the Hierarchy and the public about the existence of such a category of people in the church, though “There are miles to go...” yet. There are many exceptionally gifted single persons serving the church and her mission (of evangelization) so generously with their time, talents and resources in great freedom and flexibility of life.

‘Jesus Youth’ is another versatilely rich area where I find great fulfilment in my involvement. The Charismatic renewal has contributed thousands of committed young men and women, and

boys and girls who love and serve the church whole heartedly. I started in the renewal as a youth, grew with them, and remain with them, encouraging and supporting them. These young people remind me of St. Augustine's words: "we are an Easter people and Halleluyah is our song". Halleluyah!

The renewal experience has given me much confidence, inner freedom and courage to take initiatives. I have seen this happening to many of my friends too. The one year Bible course I attended at the Catholic Charismatic Bible College in Bombay (in 1979-80), and the many National and Regional Charismatic programmes, contributed much to my Catholic formation. The chance I got to attend an International Leaders' Conference in Rome (in 1981) also helped me much. At our audience with Pope John Paul II (for 90 mts) in the Vatican Gardens, we spent about 45 mts in prayer of praise and worship. When the whole congregation of 600 delegates from all over the world, broke out in Jubilation of 'Singing in Tongues', the Holy Father lifted up his head looking around, with a nod, radiating his wonder and great joy. After the prayer, the Pope started his long address with the words: 'I come here to teach you, but also to learn from you...' I met many International leaders, visited a few Charismatic groups and communities in the United States, and could meet with a few committed singles living dedicated life. All these helped me in developing and clarifying my vision of the Renewal of the Church and of my personal vocation.

The effective pastoring and spiritual guidance I receive regularly, contribute much to my spiritual nourishment and strength. Charismatic renewal has changed my prayer life, deepened my commitment to Jesus, to my profession, to persons, to the church and to the world and has changed my priorities. As a person deeply involved with the Charismatic renewal activities, my life has not always been very easy and without problems and troubles. But with the Lord I could face the world and problems joyfully. I have learned 'to rejoice always and to give thanks in everything', knowing 'this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning me' here and now. Today I can accept everything with a positive attitude.

I am grateful for this chance of writing and publishing my personal witness of what the Lord has done to me and what He is

doing in and through the Charismatic Renewal to the Church and the world. "He has vouchsafed the lowly estate of His handmaid". Today I rejoice and sing with our mother:

"My soul doth magnify the Lord...
My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour
For He that is mighty hath done great things
And holy is His Name"!

Praise the Lord!

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C. C. Alicekutty

Catholic Charismatic Renewal: a Personal Witness

The author offers a personal witness to the Catholic Charismatic Movement where he finds an attractive presentation of the person and message of Jesus Christ with great freshness, the rare experience of a meaningful worship and liturgy, and the insight that to be a Christian means to lead a life of joy and praise.

My initiation into the Charismatic Renewal was nothing spectacular. It was neither an emotional experience, nor connected with any miraculous event; but it grew out of my conviction that God is there and I very much need His Holy Spirit.

This sort of faith was the very thing I lacked in 1976 when I happened to attend a four day seminar on the changing attitudes of the youth towards life and God. Active from my childhood in parish life and pious organisations, my plan for future has always been to enter into a life of active ministry in the church. By the time I entered the university I had a lot of doubts about God, found it difficult to accept many things in the Church and my emotional and spiritual life was an utter chaos.

I was a member of a Catholic student organisation at that time. Many of us were eager to do something for the poor. Some of us chose a fisherfolk colony and started visiting it. There is 'no one to take any responsibility', was the usual refrain we heard at the evaluation sessions. Now as I look back, I can see that we had enough of enthusiasm and we acquainted ourselves with the dynamics of social and economic realities, but totally lacked either a spiritual motivation or a clear vision about the possible work. Our different social projects including the one for organising the rickshaw wallahs met with untimely death.

It was during these days of frustration, when my own inner life was totally in the dark, that I happened to attend a spiritual renewal seminar by a team of priests from Bombay. It was one of the first such in Kerala. My scattered impressions of it are: an attractive presentation of the person of Christ and of the Church with great freshness; a first experience of a meaningful liturgy; an insight that to be a Christian means to lead a joyous life of 'praise'; a new awareness of the work of the Holy Spirit and a deep conviction that I am becoming part of something historic and there is a lot more to discover in it. All this was taking place in an atmosphere of great personal warmth while everything was explained with simplicity and clarity with abundant references to the Bible. The Bible itself was coming alive with full of insights.

A gradual change

When some of my friends who attended the retreat with me began to tell me about their "wonderful" experiences, my own inner reactions were somewhat mixed. In a way I was not eager to have these "the-Lord-is-sooo-good" feeling. But, then, for me God was still so far away and prayer was mostly like talking to a wall. But I wanted a change.

Now as I look back I see that the Lord's Spirit had been working in me in a unique way. Gradually I began to long for more and more quiet time with the Lord. I found myself in an environment in which priority to Jesus and to a life with Him came to be of greatest importance. I began to acquire a habit of regular personal prayer. Instead of reading the Bible with a view to find supporting arguments against the Church, I began to read, relish and find great inspiration from the Word of God. A friendship circle where prayer, sincere sharing and mutual acceptance were coming up

so spontaneously, was constantly growing around me and transforming all the different levels of my self and my surroundings.

My emotional life was the one area where a great change for the better began to take place. The concept of "Inner healing" was something quite appealing and my prayer found a new dimension with this cross breed of Depth Psychology and the Breath of the Spirit. This became a continuing journey of self discovery, acceptance and quiet determination. As a result my relationships improved. My habit of running away from family in the name of "good works" and fear of intimacy began to get transformed. My 'Ideal Church' has always been a loving community. With this gradual healing I found a ray of hope for its possibility.

For me, the discovery of a personal mission is closely related to my walk in the Spirit through the Charismatic Renewal. That God has a plan for my life and He is empowering me with charisms, and gradually unfolding it through my life and events and through my friends, is an all pervading experience for me.

Towards fruitfulness

People often ask me how some of the powerful initiatives like the *Rex Band*, *Jesus Youth*, new moves like *Christeen*, *Campus Ministry* and *Young Professionals Net-works* took shape and wield such great influence on the modern generation. My answer is that they and many such zealous groups with a sense of Catholic mission are some of the wonderful testimonies of the work of the Spirit in the modern age. A few of us who attended the '76 Renewal Programme and the subsequent retreats have constantly been in touch with each other, sharing our experiences, dreams and resources in whatever way possible. This friendship circle is steadily growing. Some of these outreaches are the outer manifestations of these Christian friendship groups.

At a time when the Church is moved by the Spirit to think aloud on the participation of Lay faithful in its mission, I feel the Spirit is raising patterns of development for Lay Ministries at the grassroots level.

Reflections on the Charismatic Renewal

Started in the USA in the late '60s, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal reached India in early '70s and spread to the different

parts of the country in a few years' time. It has given hope and fidelity to tens of thousands but has also caused considerable confusion in many. Looked upon by some as a great opportunity for the Church in the modern world, while condemned as a menace by others, it still continues to flourish and fade at the same time.

Weaknesses

Emotionalism and running after the spectacular many a time defeats the essential purpose of the Charismatic Renewal. This, of course, is a corrupt form of the personal orientation of the Renewal, but for the unthinking this may lead to imbalances and distortions in their spiritual life.

Narrow Interests of leaders and the led have come out in various groups in the form of overemphasis on Healing and other manifestation of gifts, of greed for power and money, and of some hurt feelings occupying the central place.

Poor quality of spiritual and intellectual formation is usually responsible for the lack of openness and for fundamentalism manifested by some people in the Renewal.

Groupism has revealed itself in the different schools of the Renewal circles and elitism in the context of the larger society. This, of course, is an expression of the freedom and encouragement for personal initiative tasted, some times, for the first time, in the Renewal, but, unfortunately, misused defeating its very purpose.

Strengths of the Charismatic Renewal

Centrality of God in life as an idea relevant and practical for today's world is presented to each individual in a very powerful way through the Renewal. Reflection on the Trinity, restatement of the Basic Christian Message, adult initiation or 'reinitiation' into the life of the Church, God's providence etc., are the factors that make the Renewal a transforming experience for the ordinary human.

Focus on the person and one's physical, emotional, spiritual and social needs in the Renewal retreats and groups has exerted a liberative influence on millions of individuals and changed many of the communities and some of the power centres in the Church.

Striving for holiness in this modern age, especially for the ordinary ones, has become something practical. Models for genuine Christian living, of all types and at all levels, have been

formed and offered to the Church through the Renewal. Together with its powerful modes of teaching the Renewal has come to be the best challenge for a holy living. A personal programme for everyday Christian living, very often called "the Constants" has transformed many ordinary lives.

The spontaneous yearning for *fellowship and community* that this move of the Spirit produces, has been guided in many situations to form mature Catholic communities with vibrancy and a sense of mission.

Personal initiative and creativity in Christian life and mission and a deep personal commitment that the Spirit invests in the faithful are very much manifest in the Renewal.

In Today's Church

Asked to comment on the shortcomings of the traditional churches, I will list some of them, not forgetting the variety of ministries and persons of holiness and integrity that one can see at all levels of the Church.

Weaknesses

- 1 Many leaders in the Church seem to be not in touch with people in general and the cultural changes that are taking place in the world around. As there is no reflection on the impact these developments have on the inner life especially of the young, the Church activities often become irrelevant to the majority.
- 2 With the emphasis on rituals, the person with his experiential dimension and need for inner conviction is totally forgotten. Ongoing faith formation, with clarity and creativity is very much lacking. The individual seldom receives a relevant plan or programme for growing in relation with God or in the Church. As a result different sects easily attract people who receive much attention and guidance there.
- 3 Everything connected with spirituality is considered to be the responsibility of the clergy and they in turn are trained to exercise a worse-than-worldly style of absolute power. The lesser mortals in the Church are left with either absolute compliance or outright rebellion.
- 4 Room for personal initiative, creativity and adventure for the ordinary person in the realm of faith life is almost nil.

- 5 As the different communities and religious congregations lack common goals and shared missions interaction and cooperation between the various segments is absent. Very often this results in unnecessary competition and materialistic attitudes.
- 6 The public image that the Church projects is that of money power and political influence. Most of the important steps that the local churches take are to safeguard and expand this influence. Even the little charity that it displays is seemingly to cover up these selfish motives. Such perception often alienates the church institutions from people who look for a "just Kingdom".
- 7 More than anything the traditional churches are suspicious of all innovations, new ideas and persons of con-conformity. This lack of openness and resistance to change makes it an archaic institution.

In conclusion

The Charismatic Renewal is one of the many ways in which the Spirit of God is transforming the face of the Church. Many segments of the Church are refreshed by the breath of the Spirit but seldom continue and mature in the God's move of love.

In order to build a relevant Church for the modern world we need:

- Church Leaders with integrity and vision who are ready to listen to the Lord and to His work in this age through the various events and movements so that new dynamics of community building will surge up in the Church.
- Lay faithful who are refreshed in their relationship with God and moved by His Spirit to an authentic Christian witness, guided to a mature life in the Church.
- Christian communities built on prayer and fellowship that are ready to take initiatives to reach out to the modern world with Jesus' love.
- Different institutions in the Church reoriented to be support systems for Christian formation and training for Evangelisation.

With a fresh look at the witness of the Charismatic renewal may the Church be able to give heed to what the Spirit is telling her in this modern age, and be excellently adorned as the True Bride of Christ in all splendour.

Edward A. Edezhath

Charismatic Renewal in My Life

The author narrates his experience of the Charismatic Renewal Movement to which he went with reluctance as an observer and came out as an involved participant. According to him, in the Charismatic Movement many people experience peace of mind and find solutions to their personal problems. In the Church there is need for a harmonious blending of the hierarchical and charismatic elements.

It was in 1976 when I was serving St. Michael's Parish at Bronx in New York that I first attended a Charismatic prayer meeting. While I was studying at Belgium from 1974-76 I heard much about the prayer groups and charismatic activities in Brussels and Louvain, but I never got a chance to attend them. I went to the American prayer meeting merely as an observer. It was on Tuesday 27th July that Fr. Thaglienthy, the parish Vicar told me about the prayer meeting. I was reluctant at first, for I thought it was some Pentecostal group. What came into my mind was the recollection of a woman I had seen in white attire going through the streets of Cochin singing songs and shouting Hallelujahs when I was at Sacred Heart Monastery, Thevara after my Ordination. Their sentimental actions and emotional prayers irritated me.

But Father Vicar at Bronx told me that this prayer meeting held in the Catholic Church had nothing to do with Pentecostalism. Both of us went to the church after dinner. A few had already arrived. Some were greeting each other, others arranging the chairs and some took the song books. Someone said "let us sing a song ...". They started singing. A youth started playing the guitar. Again some hymns. Then soft yet audible prayers. Some "strange sounds and unintelligent words"! I sat there without understanding. While they all sat in a circle and in order, I sat behind out of the circle. Someone read a scripture text, followed by a time of silence. Then Fr. Vicar gave a short explanation and interpretation. After sometime the Vicar introduced me to the group saying that I was an Indian studying in Belgium and would be returning to India at the end of the year, etc. He added that

the majority of the Indians were Hindus. He asked them to pray for me to be able to do the evangelization work when I was back in India. At once they all gathered around me and started praying for me under the leadership of the Vicar. They prayed for me placing their hands on my head, others on my shoulders and yet others holding my hands. There was powerful prayer for a few minutes. Some were praying in strange sounds and songs. Then they returned to their seats. I pulled my chair a little forward and joined the circle. I felt very happy and there was an exalted feeling. There was cooling effect, I felt very peaceful and relaxed.

The prayer meeting continued, some shared their testimony (life experience) of God's providence and healing, etc. And it was concluded with the Lord's Prayer and everyone parted shaking hands and greeting each other.

I saw one young man remaining there alone. I went to him and asked whether he was not going home. He gave me a blank look and said, "Someone will come with a car to take me home". Michael had been born blind but from his external appearance we couldn't make it out. He had a lot of treatment, but without any good results. I asked whether he was worried about his blindness. Michael replied, "I was angry and sad; I used to curse my parents and God for it. But now it is all different. I praise God. For though I cannot see, I can hear and touch. I thank God. It is through the Charismatic prayer that I could come to this attitude. The change of attitude that had come about in Michael, I thought, was quite unusual. This experience and what I heard and saw in that prayer meeting touched me deeply.

I went to the prayer meeting the next week also. This time my attitude was different, I was not an observer. Mrs. Chris, a young mother, shared her testimony of healing from a fatal disease. Doctors had given up. She received healing only through prayer.

During those days I could attend some other prayer meetings also and later I read a number of books on the Charismatic Renewal.

After returning to Kerala in December 1976, I attended a five day retreat for the priests at BLM Aloor in February 1977. Fr. Rufus Pereira of Bombay who was leading the retreat prayed for me and suggested to me to become a full time retreat preacher. From that time on literally I have been a full time worker in the Charis-

matic Renewal, mainly giving Charismatic retreats and writing books (already 8 books, a number of articles and leaflets).

What I witnessed in Michael in the first prayer meeting was an experience of inner healing. He was not healed of his blindness but was freed of his wounded feelings and negative thoughts. In Mrs. Chris' case it was physical healing. It created a conversion experience in both and they accepted Jesus as their Saviour and Lord. Both these point towards the very objects of the renewal and the manifestation of spiritual gifts that help the renewal.

Relevance of the Charismatic Renewal

What set the stage for this renewal was the dryness experienced in the traditional churches in the past and present. The dryness that set in the prayers and traditional rituals which very often far fetched from its scriptural roots together with clericalism made it difficult for the common man to get along comfortably with the main stream of the church. In the Charismatic Renewal the role of the laity is quite significant. Today there are any number of lay preachers and many others who have shown their competence in a variety of ministries.

The fact that in the renewal people experience peace of mind and find solutions for many of their problems, attracts more and more people into this spiritual experience. In the prayer meetings and fellowship there is an eagerness to discover the spirit of the early church (Acts 2: 42-47). The Covenant Communities in the U.S. like the Word of God Community are aiming at this. In Kerala the Jesus Youth and other movements also aim at witnessing the power in Jesus in the spheres of life. They have all progressed to a great extent.

The essence of renewal

This is not an organisation but a movement or rather a moving of the Spirit. It aims at the sanctification of the whole individual. St. Paul said, "May the God of Peace purify you. May your spirit, mind and body be faultless and whole (1 Thes. 5: 23). Normally in a five day retreat the talks are arranged in such a way that people experience the love of God the Father. The redemptive and saving love of Jesus instills in us the faith that He is our only Saviour. The infilling of the Spirit and the availability of the gifts prepare the person for a brand new life. This is a

basic conversion. But it continues to deepen with personal prayer, sacramental life, Bible reading and prayer meetings. But unfortunately sufficient importance is not given to this second stage. With the first experience itself many feel that they have had all that they wanted. Some of them come to possess certain strange gifts and seem to reach a state of infallibility and the resultant strangeness. This is dangerous. Let us see what St. Paul says, "I don't claim I have got everything. But I am striving towards it" (Ph. 2: 12). It is only through spiritual training and ecclesiastical fellowship that each experience of conversion will mature, producing lasting fruits.

Where there is freedom of the spirit with a minimum of organisational structures and the necessary regulations the process of renewal will become effective. If not the results would be disastrous. Holy Spirit is a spirit of unity and mutual submission. Certainly we can create a new heaven and earth if we combine effectively the hierarchical nature of the church together with its 'Charismatic' nature well manifested in the Charismatic Movement.

Jos Palatty

The Climate of the New Christian Sects and Movements

A Socio-Cultural and Political Analysis

The author who is a sociologist, analyses the socio-economic and political functioning of the new Christian Sects which have their origins in the western world, especially in the United States of America. In today's socio-economic and political globalization process, many of these new sects seem to function as ideological tools in the hands of the western, capitalistic and ruling elites. They "produce" and "supply" religious myths and rituals according to the 'needs' of other peoples especially of the third world, and thus conquer and subjugate them religiously, economically, socially and politically. Evidently most of these sects are politically biased and pro-western. The author here limits himself to the social function of these sects, and he does not deny the theological functions performed by them.

1. Introduction

1.0. It is an universally accepted fact that the Church is a principal actor in international society today, and like all actors on stage she is cued. The present phenomenon of neo-christian sects is definitely a product of such cueing. I propose that we examine the growth and spread of neo-christian sects and movements generally, within the contextual reality of globalisation today. The globalisation of capital has far reaching consequences not merely economically and politically but also socially. In my view, therefore, it is quite opportune on this occasion to look at the consequences of globalisation on the symbolic representation of a society in the making.

1.1. The social function of religion is axiomatic. It is readily accepted that religion can and often does influence the economical and political spheres. In his encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, John Paul II acknowledges the role of the Church thus:

It cannot be forgotten that the fundamental crisis of systems claiming to express the rule and indeed the dictatorship of the

*working class began with the great upheavals which took place in Poland in the name of solidarity. It was the throngs of working people which foreswore the ideology which presumed to speak in their name. On the basis of a hard, lived experience of work and of oppression, it was they who recovered and, in a sense, rediscovered the content and principles of the Church's social doctrine.*¹

1.2. However, what is not often readily subscribed to is the fact that the economic and political fields have been cueing the Church as a social actor. Hence, I propose:

- a. That the neo-christian sects and movements within christianity are, the result of the economic and political globalisation process which determines their nature, growth and diffusion; and,
- b. That even though the symbolic field of religion is, at best politically ambiguous, these neo-christian sects and movements are politically biased in favour of the ruling elites within the emerging globalised society.

1.3. The relationships between different groups of persons within a society are represented symbolically. These symbolic representations are influenced by the mode of production. In India, we have a macrostructure of asymmetrically articulated modes of production, and hence it is not possible to speak of a single religion, even under the umbrella term "Hinduism", which, is in fact an agglomeration of a plurality of doctrines, and beliefs. Some of these were, in their historical origins antagonistic, but later accommodated within the appellation. Similarly, we can say the same of "Christianity" which, even though it has a definite set of doctrines and beliefs, yet in practice has been accommodated and does in its practitioners' manner, harmonize with the "caste" structure of the host society — ancient "hindu" society. Pioneering studies in the field of sociology of religion in India and Sri Lanka have established some of these facts.²

1 Op. Cit., n. 23.

2 Cfr. Houtart and Lemerclinier: *The Great Asiatic Religions and their Social Functions*, Louvain-La-Neuve, Centre de Recherches Socio-Religieuses, 1983; also, Houtart: *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka*, Bangalore, TPI, 1974; and Lemerclinier: *Religion and Ideology in Kerala*, Louvain-la-Neuve, CRSR, Université Catholique de Louvain, 1983.

1.4. It is in the light of these and other on-going studies that we shall proceed to make our analysis. We will first examine the religious field within Indian society, and try to decipher the implications of its being positioned in a conflictive process of restructuration of the inter — and intra-class, and also of inter — and intra-caste divisions. We will then go on to examining the globalisation process and its attendant politicisation of religion to recover the true, though often non-conscious³, nature of the neo-christian sects and movements as ideological instruments of the internationalization of western capital.

2. The Religious Field

2.0. At the very outset it must be made clear that even though the term "religion" has a much larger content, what interests us here is its social dimension. Therefore, without denying the theological, or other contents of the term we understand religion primarily as a social reality which has been defined from a sociological perspective, by P. Bourdieu, as

*a symbolic medium at once structured and structuring. In so far as it is the condition of the possibility of an agreement on the meaning of signs and on the meaning of the world.*⁴

Doutreloux, on his part sees religion as

*rendering acceptable the tensions, contradictions and conflicts necessarily entailed by any social organisation and by any human relationship with others and with the world.*⁵

2.1. Thus, as advocated by Houtart⁶, we shall understand religion as *structural symbolic medium, an organized set of meanings, a frame of reference for all reality, structured around*

3 I use the term "non-conscious" deliberately to distinguish from "unconscious". By non-conscious I mean that though we knowingly and deliberately set out goals and objectives for ourselves, the end result of our actions turns out to be completely different and often just the contrary of our stated goals and objectives. These ensuing effects are therefore non-conscious occurrences.

4 Cfr. P. Bourdieu: *Genese et structure du champ religieux*, *Revue Francaise de sociologie*, XII (1971), pp. 295-6 and quoted in Houtart: *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka*, Bangalore, TPI, 1974, p. 6.

5 Cfr. A. Doutreloux: "Mythe, rite et Christianisme", *Revue Theologique de Louvain*, n. 1 (1971) p. 370.

6 Cfr. Houtart: *Religion and Ideology in Sri Lanka*, Bangalore, TPI, 1974, pp. 6-12.

oppositions between variables within a social ensemble and which it reduces to harmony.

2.1.A. This reduction to harmony is done by a process of "sacralization". The two orders of reality, one endogenous and the other exogenous, that is, the natural and the supernatural, are linked either by myth or by rites, or both, within a belief system. For example, the class and caste antagonisms between the 'forward' and 'backward' classes and caste groupings (not excluding the tribals) have been "reduced to harmony" by the sacralizing process of *Ram rajya* and renaming of former *dalit* groups as "hindu" and *adivasis* (or original inhabitants) as *vanavasis*.

2.1.B. Three corollaries follow from this:

- i. Since every society consists of dominant and dominated groups, in so far as religious demands are expressed, they will inevitably vary according to these social groups.
- ii. For every religious "demand" there is a corresponding religious "supply".
- iii. There is an interaction among the many constitutive elements within the religious field, viz., the religious institutions of diverse and varied religious systems and their agents.

2.1.B.i. Society, as observed everywhere, is stratified into basically (though not exclusively) two classes, and, in the Indian sub-continent, into traditionally five (sometimes more) caste groups with even many more sub-caste groupings. Our analysis of the neo-christian sects and movements will obviously need to determine the social location of the adherents of these sects and movements in the multi-layered stratified Indian society. We can, however, by general observation, locate the adherents of the neo-christian sects among those who are or have been socially, economically or politically disadvantaged by the other social groupings within that particular society. Secondly, but not exclusively, within the urbanized, westernized middle classes or westernized tribal groupings. However, we also have to consider the other following two factors.

2.1.B.ii. The first factor will be that of "supply" and "demand" of religious goods and services. This obviously presupposes a production of these religious goods and services. This production is often entrusted to religious "specialists" who produce

“meaning” destined for socially diversified groups who demand them.

2.1.B.ii.a. In the context of our present analysis, the specialists entrusted with the “production” are either themselves inhabitants of some of the western countries, particularly the USA, or co-opted by the “owning class” who are in control.

2.1.B.ii.b. As for the “demands” it becomes obvious that they will vary according to the social location or position of a particular group within the stratified society. As far as our observation goes we note that the “producers” target their production for the consumption of the lower-strata within the developing countries. It would not be unfair or out of place to speak of “creating demands” through aggressive advertising.

2.1.B.iii. Ours is a pluralist society and there are several religious systems co-existing, often within the same socially located groupings. It is important to note therefore, that the set of relationships between the various “owners”, “producers”, and “consumers”, defines the roles of the respective social actors in the religious market place and constitutes the social system of religious institutions. The complexus of the Indian society has, over the centuries, produced a macro-structure within which these religious institutions relate and inter-relate, often with “accommodation”, “assimilation” and “acculturation”. This explains why “caste” identities and loyalties persist even today among, and towards, converts to Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, etc.

2.1.B.iii.a. A group often spontaneously produces the response to its own demands through a re-interpretation of myths and rites or by the activation of particular devotions. A contemporary example of this is the *Ram janmabhoomisthan*, *Ram silanyas* and *Ram padukas*. However, even though there are similar “productions” among christian groups within the Indian social macro-structure, they lack the “entrepreneurial” backing of the ‘owning’ classes and so remain as localised, common ‘devotions’ (sometimes referred to as “popular devotions”) largely isolated among the lower strata. No wonder then that one does not hear of neo-christian sects originating indigenously even though there may be “popular devotions”.

2.1.B.iii.b. The diversity that we notice of religious productions corresponds to the different demands deriving from different specific interests of the various social groups. Often these begin as conflictual and antagonistic or "competitive" productions opposed by socially conflictive groupings. Notice here the contemporary phenomenon of the various religious systems in India in interaction with one another: the VHP-RSS-BJP-Bajrang Dal combine in interaction with the ISS or even the christian groups in Kanyakumari Dt., or in Indore. But, then, as in the past, through the process of "assimilation" and "accommodation" (as in the case of Buddhism, Jainism and Brahmanical Hinduism in the post-Sankaracharya era), the conflictual and competitive market finds an equilibrium where the symbolic representations are modified to accomodate the demands of the new groups emerging. Thus, the Buddha will appear in the "hindu" pantheon as an *avatar* of the supreme deity.

2.1.B.iii.c. At this point of our analysis we would do well to note that it is not simply the conscious willingness of a group of believers, or religious leaders, that will define the development and the end product of their religious activity. Rather, it is the structure of the society in which they act that will define what forms of activity are more feasible for them to develop (and which, however bravely they may be sought after, are simply impossible). It will also determine what the more probable results of such activity will be (even when these results are energetically repudiated by the religious exponents, who may have earnestly tried to avoid them).

2.2. By way of summary, then, upon this canvas we have sketched out that quite a number of neo-christian sects and movements have originated and emerged from the United States of America (USA), the heart of western capitalism, and, that the "specialists" that do most of the "production" of religious goods either originate there or co-opt local elites who "supply" to the "demands" created or made in the socio-economic and political crucible of the third world. Besides, like the consumers of other capital goods and services in the globalised market, the consumers of these religious "goods and services" are the urban middle — or higher income groups within the third world who have been exposed rather extensively (chronologically and geographically) to westernisation.

3. Globalisation

3.0. The term can simply be understood as 'making the world into a single socio-cultural place'. This involves four basically inter-related processes⁷:

a. *societalization* (the globe-wide making of the modern national society);

b. *individuation* (the modern making of the individual as a person);

c. *internationalization* (the expansion of the original European state system so as to include virtually all the societies of the modern world in a globe-wide 'international society'); and finally;

d. *humanization* (the thematization of the humankind).

3.1. It is obvious that the entire globe is now an open arena for the many religious systems to compete and be pitted against each other, subject only to the law of the market: viz., supply and demand. Therefore, while the west is seeking to propagate neo-christian sects and movements in the neo-colonies of the third world, there is an equally competitive export of god-men from the Indian sub-continent to compete with and supply the demands of groups within western and far-eastern societies for religious meaning systems — myths and rituals. The growth of the Hare-Krishna movement in the west, of the Islamic movements in the middle east, and of the *Aum Shirin Kyo* sect in the east, are pertinent to the point.

3.2. The project of making a world society demands a symbolic representation that is also universally accepted as such. However, the eastern religious systems like Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Shintoism, Sikhism, Taoism etc. perceive the individual very differently from western societies. But with the globalisation of capital the individual is seen within the context of the market forces. This process internationalized under the garb of the religious field is what has brought about the politicisation of religion.

7 Cfr. Robertson, Roland: "Globalization, Politics, and Religion" in Beckford and Luckmann (Eds.), *The Changing Face of Religion*, London, Sage Studies in International Sociology 37, 1991, pp. 10-23.

3.A. Globalisation and Politicisation of Religion

3.A.0. The process of the politicisation of religion implies firstly, that there is an increase in concern on the part of religious collectivities with governmental issues³.

3.A.1. Take for example, the recent moral crusades initiated by the Christian revivalists in the USA which campaigned during the recent elections to the US Congress and House of Representatives on the moral issues of family values, pro-life legislation, anti-gay rights, etc. This resulted in a defeat of the Democratic Party and the triumph of the so-called *Contract with America*.

3.A.1.a. In India, we have seen that the corruption brought to light around first, the HDW submarine deal, then the Fairfax issue and later, the Bofors gun deal led to a moral crusade capitalised upon by the BJP-RSS-VHP combine under the banner of *Ram Rajya*

3.A.1.b. In most of the Arab countries in emulation of the victorious Iranian revolution more and more religious collectivities are becoming concerned with governmental issues.

3.A.1.c. This has obviously led to a consideration of how "secularism" should be defined today. But no amount of debate on that issue can detract from the reality that globalisation has brought with it a politicisation of religion. And it is in this context that we must admit to the inevitable conclusion that the burgeoning of neo-christian sects and movements cannot be taken as political neutrality. It is not co-incidental to our discussion that many of these neo-christian sects and movements now proliferating in India have not only fully supported the Contract with America and but seek to globalise it into a Contract with a World free from immorality as defined by them: thus, the campaign against psychotropic substances, narcotics and drug abuse, gay rights and abortion, and human rights. In actuality, therefore, these neo-christian sects, despite their conscious protestations, are non-consciously the vehicles of religious "goods" and "services" meant to propagate the ideology of the ruling elites of the USA world-wide.

3.A.2. The second implication of the process of politicisation of religion is the denial of autonomy to the religious field.

8 Robertson, Roland, op. cit., p. 11ff.

Thus, the global socio-economic and political agenda determines the religious field. Put briefly, what is good for the global economy is religiously right and acceptable. In this light no matter how humanly devastating it might be to the original forest dwellers, to their right to land, a decent living etc., big dams and mega-developmental projects are just right. It is interesting that eco-theology and eco-feminist theology are not only foreign to the neo-christian sects and movements but they are often positively antagonistic to them.

3.B. Globalisation, Relativization and Particularization

3.B.0. The process of globalisation not surprisingly involves and promotes the *relativisation* of societal and individual identities. After 1989 there has been a general perception that state-run societies like the erstwhile Soviet Union failed because it had reduced the individual person to a mere element, or as John Paul II puts it, to "a molecule within the social organism"⁹. The individual person was subordinated to the functioning of the socio-economic mechanism. This perception was said to have led to a re-affirmation of the individual identities of ethnic groups which immediately resulted in the breaking up of the Soviet "bloc" into a Commonwealth of Independent States and which we are still seeing in the tragic tearing apart of the former Yugoslavia in what is now called "ethnic cleansing".

3.B.1. Incidentally, this relativisation as we see it unfold in various conflict zones around the globe (e.g., Algeria, Bosnia, Kashmir, Northern Ireland, the Philippines etc.) is expressed in terms of religious belief systems as if religion had taken on the role of an ideology¹⁰. Or has it not? In any case, globalisation has promoted the relativisation of societal and individual identities such that it is now current to speak of Bosnian Serbs, Bosnian Muslims, Kashmiri Muslim militants, Kashmiri Hindu refugees, Sri Lankan Tamils from Jaffna, or Catholics of Belfast, or of Londonderry etc.

3.B.2. But then, there is another side: the universalization of particularism, which is also a part of the globalisation process

9 Cfr. John Paul II: *Centesimus Annus*, n. 13.

10 Note the terminology used by the media: the 'Bosnian Muslim Government Forces', the *muslim* separatists in Kashmir, the mainly *catholic* republican terrorists — the IRA, the *hindu* militants at Ayodhya, etc.

taking place. What many fail to notice is that, thanks to the spread of the neo-christian sects, while even in the capitalist western societies the individual is reduced to a commodity, a cog in the machinery of productive forces, the particular weakness of socialism/communism is universalised to absolve the same lacuna within capitalism.

3.B.3. It has thus far become clear, I hope, that, given the globalisation process the "production", "supply" and "demand" of religious goods is not only cued by the economic and political interests of the global ruling elites, but that, religion itself has become a symbolic representation of the particularities of individuals within the growing internationalization process. In this context we cannot speak of a politically neutral church or sect. To be neutral is to be committed willy nilly, albeit non-consciously.

4. The Ethics of Economics

4.0. In today's globalisation process religion, as a social factor, does play an important role in maintaining the domination of the western elites. This plainly makes religion into an ideological instrument, which, of course, will be denied by the protagonists of the capitalist western powers. As Pereira and Seabrook note:

The Europeans had the morals of the New Testament. Not surprisingly, since wealth and power show little tendency to be bounded by moral constraints upon their actions, over time, these came to be interpreted in such a way as to produce two distinct ethical systems, one for the rich and powerful and another for the impoverished and powerless. Robbery was what the pickpocket practised but not what the landlord did when he enclosed the commons, even though the former may have taken a few pennies, while the latter took away the very livelihood of the tenants. Murder was what the highwayman committed, not what kings perpetrated when they invaded, massacred and looted their neighbours—whom they were supposed to love...

Such bifurcation was the foundation of the Western system, it still forms its maintenance. It is exhibited in every aspect of westernized life: from the misuse of the UN, the

*GATT, IMF and WB, to the disposal of toxic wastes and the pricing of commodities*¹¹.

4.1. It is worthwhile noting that Adam Smith's theory of moral sentiments has enabled the Western economic system to externalise all the impoverishments and immiserations, the hurt and the environmental degradation onto the disadvantaged groups within the third world, as a necessary consequence of 'development' which, it is proposed, ultimately works for the 'good of all'. Such ethics permits the western multinational companies (MNCs) to claim the right to manufacture, sell toxic pesticides and harmful drugs to the rest of the world even when they are not registered for use or banned in their own countries¹².

4.2. The neo-christian sects and movements, by remaining oblivious to these subtle implications are often manoeuvred into being the tools by which the western world supplies the demands of disadvantaged groups for "liberation" through the production and distribution of allegedly salvific "myths" and "rituals", which in actual fact are mere instruments for the propagation of an ideology (not often perceived as such) which subordinates the world's peoples for the master race of the western white race. This in effect has actuated and exacerbated the separatist tendencies among some neo-christian sects in the north-east into becoming liberation movements from the Indian republic. Crudely termed 'fundamentalism', it has provoked other social groups to construct their own "myths" and "rituals" to counter-act these neo-christian sects and movements thus bringing about social unrest and violent repression. It is time, therefore, to read the signs of the times and be a church of repentant sinners.

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11 Cfr. Pereira and Seabrook: *Global Parasites — Five Hundred Years of Western Culture*, Bombay, Earthcare Books, 1994, p. 201.

12 Cfr. PTI, London's report "Deadly experiments with chapatis" in *Deccan Herald*, Monday, July 17, 1995, p. 11 in which it is reported that 21 Asian women were carefully selected in the 1960s & 1970s for experiments that involved serving them with chapatis made from flour mixed with mild radioactive iron salts.

The New Christian Sects

A Brief Historical Introduction

The article is meant to be a historical and theological introduction to the most important new Christian Sects in the world today. The new Christian Sects today have to be understood in the historical context of the early Christian Sects and Medieval sectarian movements. Many of the early sects appear again and again in new forms. The author points out that the border line between Denominations and Sects is very narrow and ambiguous. But the typical characteristics of a Christian Sect can be reconstructed. What is important is to understand the New Christian Sects in their actual historical, cultural, social and theological context. Any hasty condemnation of them as Christian aberrations may not be wise and correct.

One of the characteristics of our time is the mushrooming of new religious sects and movements at the periphery of the world religions. In the context of free market economy and globalization these new sects have free access to every nook and corner of the world and they are in competition with one another. It is really amazing that in our so-called secular, scientific and nuclear age these sects are flourishing in their numerous clientele, especially in the economically and technologically advanced western world. There are several studies already on these new sects, cults and religious movements which could be understood and explained only in their cultural, social, economic, political, religious and psychological context.¹

1 Jacob Needleman and George Baker (eds.), *Understanding the New Religions*, New York: The Seabury Press, 1978; Jacob Needleman, *The New Religions*, London: Allan Lane The Penguin Press, 1970; James J. LeBar, *Cults, Sects and the New Age*, Huntington, 1989; Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, Minneapolis: Bethany House Publications, 1985; Peter Rowley, *New Gods in America: An Informal Investigation into the New Religions of American Youth Today*, New York: 1971; George Gallop, *Religion in America 1979-80*, Princeton Religion Research Center, 1980; Bryan Wilson, *Contemporary Transformations of Religion*, New York: 1976; Charles Glock and Robert Bellah (eds.), *The New Religious Consciousness*, Berkeley: 1976; Robert

Every historical religion at its origin was considered a "sect". For the Jews of the first century, Christianity was a "sect of the Nazarenes" within the Jewish religion. The Hindus consider Buddhism still a sect within the Hindu Faith. The word "sect" comes from the Latin word *sequi* = to follow, which means those who *follow* a particular religious group, political party or a philosophical school.² But the word acquired a pejorative meaning in the sense of "dissenters" or "rebels" who broke away from the parental religion or church. In this article I shall not deal with all the new religious sects that have appeared in our time. I am limiting myself to the new Christian Sects, but without attributing any pejorative meaning to the term sect. Christianity or the Christian Church today exists under various Denominations, and some of the new Christian Denominations are called or known as Christian "Sects". But the border line between Denominations and Sects is very disputable. The Pentecostal Christian groups and the Salvation Army People are widely accepted as Christian Denominations. But some people may classify them under Sects. The Seventh Day Adventists (SDA) are very often considered a Sect, but they object to this and in the Ecumenical Movement they are almost considered a Christian Denomination.

I shall not start with a definition or description of "Sect" over against "Church" and "Denomination". I shall include in this article the history of some of the Christian Denominations as well as Christian Sects. Christian Sects have their own characteristics which I shall reconstruct at the end of this article. Some Christian Denominations may share more conspicuously certain

Wuthnow, *The Consciousness Reformation*, Berkeley: 1976; T. Robbins and D. Anthony (eds.), *In Gods We Trust*, New Brunswick: 1981; Steven Tipton, *Getting Saved from the Sixties*, Berkeley: 1982; Robert S. Ellwood, *Alternative Altars: Unconventional and Eastern Spirituality in America*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979; K. McDonnell (ed.), *Presence, Power and Praise*, 3 Vols., Minnesota: 1980; Francis A. Sullivan, *Charism and the Charismatic Renewal*, Dublin: 1982; H. W. Turner, *Religious Innovation in Africa*, Boston: 1979; R. C. Mitchel and H. W. Turner, *A Bibliography of Modern Religious Movements*, Evanston: 1966; Articles in Journals are numerous on the New Religious Movements, e. g., *Concilium*, 161 (1/1983); *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 16 (1977), 21 (1982); *Journal of Dharma*, Vol. VII, No. 4, (1982); *Jeevadhara*, Vol. XX, No. 119 (1990).

2 See, Konrad Algermissen, *The Christian Sects*, Faith and Fact Books: 139, London: Burns & Oates, 1962, p. 13.

aspects and traits of the Sects where as others may explicitly reject them. Moreover, some of the Protestant Denominations are mentioned here as they form the immediate breeding grounds of many of these modern Christian Sects which have originated from liberal Protestant circles.

The history of Christian Sects is as old as the very origins of Christianity. As already mentioned, Christianity itself was considered at its origin as a Jewish sect similar to the Qumran sect of the Essenes. In the history of Christianity we could identify certain periods where sporadic movements of sects appeared. I would like to point out three such periods: (i) Early Christian Centuries: several heretical sects emerged during this period due to the fluidity and diversity of Christianity and the conflicting and contradictory claims and teachings of its leaders and prophets at this period. (ii) Protestant Reformation and the rise of Free Churches: The Protestant Reformation was followed by a proliferation of Christian denominations and sects. The break-up of the medieval Christendom, the rise of nationalism and new thinking were the actual context of the medieval Christian sects. (iii) Contemporary New Christian Sects and Movements: Political independence of peoples and nations, the new sense of freedom and religious pluralism, radical changes and insecurity and subsequent cultural mutations, lack of adequate response on the part of the traditional religions and western Capitalistic domination are at the root of the rise of new sects and cults in our times.

Early Christian Sects

Christianity spread rapidly from Jerusalem to Samaria, Antioch and to the Gentile world of Asia Minor, Greece, Rome, North Africa, and the result was the formation of a wide variety of Christian communities. The proclamation of the Christian message was adapted according to the cultural and social context of the peoples and nations and according to the particularity and individuality of the Apostles and founders of the different communities. So the early Christian communities were characterized by a rich diversity in the organizations and structures of the Church, in worship and prayers and in the formulations of beliefs and doctrines as well as in disciplinary matters. But all these Churches were united in the same Apostolic Faith, in the same fellowship and in the Breaking of the Bread (Acts, 2: 42-47; 4: 32-35; 5: 2-15).

The different ecclesial traditions and practices were not considered as an obstacle to their fundamental unity in Jesus Christ. The Council of Jerusalem (Acts, Ch. 15) was a decisive event as it successfully combined the Universal Vision of Christianity with the diversity of the Local Churches. Practice of the Jewish Church of Jerusalem (Circumcision) was not made as a norm for all the other Churches.

The details of the diversity of early Churches are not known to us. But contemporary historical and biblical studies have highlighted that different types of Christian Churches or Communities existed from the very beginning. James D. G. Dunn speaks about *four different types of earliest Churches*: (i) Jewish Christianity, (ii) Hellenistic Christianity, (iii) Apocalyptic Christianity, and (iv) Early Catholicism.³ Jewish Christian communities practically continued all the Old Testament Jewish traditions, customs, rituals and practices. They continued the observance of the Mosaic Law, the attendance at the Temple, its sacrifices and prayers. They believed in the imminent *parousia* of Jesus as the Messiah, and they did not envisage a Gentile mission outside Judaism. The Hellenistic Christianity (which consisted of Jews who spoke Greek and who were at home with Greek culture) and the Gentile Christianity had a quite different outlook and approach. They discontinued many of the Old Testament and Jewish traditions and customs, and they were the champions in opening Christianity to the Gentile world. The Apocalyptic Christian communities had quite another ethos and life-style. They continued the apocalyptic thinking of the Inter-Testamental Period. They had an utter pessimism with regard to the present world and expected the immediate end of the world and the coming of Jesus and the final deliverance. Early Catholicism means the earliest Catholic type of Christian communities with the episcopal ministries and the fixed Apostolic Tradition and other Catholic doctrines. Communities in the Pastoral Letters of Paul belong to this type.

The reference to these different types of Early Christian communities with mutual acceptance as well as tensions and conflicts is made here to draw attention to the early Christian

3 James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*, London: SCM, 1977, pp. 235-366.

Sects. Various Christian Sects existed on the fringes of these different types of Churches.

(i) The Ebionites

The Ebionites may be said to be one of the earliest among the Christian Sects. They came from the extreme wing of Jewish Christianity, and rejected the catholicity of the Church so that pagans should not be admitted into the Church *en masse*.⁴ In order to become a Christian, one has to become first a Jew and accept the Law of Moses and all its prescriptions. The Jerusalem Council (Acts, Ch. 15) led by Paul, Peter, and the other Apostles rejected this narrow view and opened the Church to the Gentiles. Hence some of these extreme Judeo-Christians separated themselves from the Church and formed a different Sect. They were called the Ebionites or the Poor or the Church of the Poor. They also differed radically in their Christological teaching. A strict belief in the Monotheism of Judaism led them to an *Adoptionist Christology*, which means that Jesus is not fully God, but adopted by God to be His Prophet. Jesus is a man, a prophet, who became the "Son of God" by his virtuous life and due to the coming of the Spirit who adopted him for a special task. The Ebionites ceased to exist by the fifth century.

(ii) The Gnostic Sects

Over against the Ebionites who came from the extreme wings of the Jewish Christians, the Gnostic Sects emerged from the opposite side of Hellenistic and Gentile Christians. Some of the Gentile Christians mixed up the Christian faith with their own indigenous myths, philosophies and ideas, especially from the Greek world, and created many syncretic systems which are known as "Christian Gnostic Sects". St. Irenaeus in his famous book, *Adversus Hereses*, in five volumes, exposed the different Gnostic Schools and systems and refuted them. Simon the Magician is often called the Father of Gnostics. Valentine, Carpocrates and Marcion are known as the leaders of some of these Gnostic Sects.

Egypt and Syria were the fertile soil for the Gnostics. The Gnostic Sects used the Platonic and Neo-Platonic philosophical framework and combined it with Judaism, Christianity and other

4 Leon Cristiani, *Heresies and Heretics*, Faith and Fact Books: 135, London Burns & Oates, 1959, p. 11.

philosophies and systems. Basically it was a dualistic system of matter and spirit as the two absolute principles. Creation as well as redemption is by intermediary gods. Jesus is an intermediary god who gave *gnosis* or secret knowledge to his disciples. Salvation or the separation between spirit and matter is possible by this secret knowledge given by Jesus. In the I Corinthians Paul seems to confront such Christian Gnostic groups who claimed to have real wisdom and are already "perfect" (I Cor. 2: 6-3: 4). While affirming the divinity of Jesus as a sub-deity, the Gnostics did not affirm the full humanity of Christ. Hence they seem to have a Docetist Christology where the humanity of Christ is only an appearance and not fully real. The resurrection of the Body was also unacceptable to the Gnostics as body and matter are inherently evil to them. Against the Gnostic Sects St. Paul, St. John and the Fathers of the Church emphasized that the "Word became flesh" and glorified in the weakness and suffering of the Crucified Christ in whom the humanity and divinity are fully united in one person. Gnostic emphasis and glorification of wisdom to the neglect of the basic law of love was unacceptable to the early Fathers of the Church. Christian Gnostic Sects were strongly condemned by the Church, and gradually they vanished from the scene during the third and fourth centuries.

(iii) Montanist, Donatist and other Enthusiastic and Adventist Sects

On the fringes of the Churches with Apocalyptic tendencies were born Adventist Christian Sects which predicted the immediate "second coming of Christ" and invited the believers to prepare for the end of this age and the Messianic rule of Christ. These Enthusiasts were "Perfectionists" and "Spiritualists" who reacted to the institutionalization of Christianity and to the formation of authoritarian and unchangeable structures of the Church. They considered only those as Christians who were really spiritual and transformed by the gift of the Holy Spirit. The members of these Sects lived a very rigid and strictly ascetical life and awaited the Second Coming of Christ.

Montanus lived during the second century in the region of Phrygia and he was very much excited by the promise of Christ about the sending of the Holy Spirit. He claimed himself to be the spokesman of the Holy Spirit and announced that the new era of

the Holy Spirit has already started with the private revelations given to him. Montanus seemed to be often in an ecstasy and two women, Prisca and Maximilla, who followed him also had ecstasies. This Sect believed in the immediate Second Coming of Christ and his thousand years rule as foretold in the Apocalypse. Naturally, as they waited for the immediate coming of Christ, they lived a detached life with a rigorous moral and ascetical life. It must be mentioned that the great Tertullian embraced the Montanist thinking during the latter part of his life. The Church condemned the Montanist Sects and they gradually disappeared during the eighth century.

A similar heretical sect was the Donatists who were in North Africa immediately after the period of persecution by the Roman emperors. During this period many Christians lapsed into Emperor worship and thus became apostates. Bishop Novatian and many other leaders refused to take back to the Church those who fell into apostasy. In this context the African Churches taught that the sacraments of the heretics and schismatics are invalid. The question was also raised whether the ordination given by sinful bishops was valid. A certain Donatus and party declared that the episcopal ordination given by a Bishop, Felix of Aptunga, was invalid as he was a public sinner. The party of Donatus was known as Donatists who held an extremely spiritualistic idea of the Church. According to them, public and open sinners do not belong to the Church because the Church is a community of saints who are really transformed by the Holy Spirit. They also taught that all the sacraments outside the one true Church are invalid. The validity of the sacraments comes from the sanctity and merit of the minister of the sacraments. Donatism was condemned, and it was St. Augustine who was the great opponent of the Donatists.

The Trinitarian and Christological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries really rocked the entire Church. Everything started with the teachings of Arius of Alexandria who taught that God is One and only, and that the Word or Logos or the Son is the first creature through whom everything else is created. The Holy Spirit in turn is the creature of the Son. It is the Word which animated the body of Jesus. Although the Council of Nicaea in 325 condemned Arianism and defined the consubstantiality of the

Father and the Son, Arianism in its different forms again gained ground and it triggered a number of Trinitarian and Christological heresies and schisms especially in the Christian East. The finale of these controversies was the Council of Chalcedon in 451, its Christological definition and the subsequent separation of the Nestorian and Monophysite Churches from the rest of the Christian Churches.

Reformation, Puritanism and the Rise of the Free Churches

The second wave of the movement of the Christian Sects came along with the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. It was not the intention of the Reformers to start new Churches or Sects. What they demanded was a radical reform of the medieval Catholic Church. But the Church authorities did not heed to the cry for reform and condemned outright the leaders of the Reformation. Hence the Reformers had to break away from the Catholic Church, and they started separate Protestant Churches. The Lutheran Churches and the Calvinist Churches (also called the Reformed Church or Presbyterian Church) were the mainline Protestant Churches. Under King Henry VIII a moderate reform was also made in the Church of England, and thus the Anglican Church came into existence as separated from the Roman Catholic Church.

In the aftermath of the reformation several Free Churches and Sects emerged in England and Europe and they were taken to America by the missionaries and emigrants. Ideas of the Reformers and the new climate of freedom became the fertile soil for the growth of the New Religious Movements⁵ And the immediate background for the emergence of the Free Churches and Sects was English Puritanism which was a reformed ethos in England. Puritanism was not a doctrinal system, although the Puritans in England were very much influenced by the Calvinist doctrines of Original Sin and Total Depravity, Justification by Faith and Predestination. It was more of a type of piety and style of living.

⁵ For an introduction on the different Christian Churches and their doctrines and practices, see, Einar Molland, *Christendom: The Christian Churches, Their Doctrines, Constitutional Forms and Ways of Worship*, London: Mowbray & Co., 1959.

The beginning of Puritanism in England was in 1559 when they began to object to many of the liturgical customs and practices of the Church of England and its patterns of ministry. It was a religious attitude which was non-sacramental and anti-institutional. Freedom of the individuals over against the control of the State, equality of every person before God, emphasis on the Word of God over against the sacraments, discipline, self-control and a rigorous ascetic life were the marks of the Puritan life-style. From this English Puritanism there emerged several Free Churches and Christian Sects, and some of them we shall enumerate below. But the Free Churches and Sects of the medieval period had already their antecedents in some of the Christian Sects in the 12th and 13th centuries. Let me start with them:

(i) The Albigensian and Waldensian Sects

The Albigensians appeared in the Abligeois region of southern France during the 12th century. They taught a kind of Manichaeism of two absolute principles, and correspondingly two Gods, one good God and the other evil God, and two Churches, the Church of the good God and the Church of the evil God or Satan. They claimed that their Church is that of the good God, the Church of Jesus Christ, and the Roman Church is the Church of Satan. They considered matter as evil and advocated strict and rigorous ascetical life. They had two classes of adherents — "the Perfect" and the ordinary "believers". The leaders of the Sect were chosen from among the "Perfect". The Sect attracted many people in France for whom the power, wealth and laxity of the Roman Catholic Church of the time were a great scandal.

Peter Waldo (1140-1217) who was a wealthy merchant of Lyons in France was the founder of this Sect and they were called after him as Waldensians or the Waldensian Church. He gave away all his wealth and went around preaching a gospel of poverty, chastity and obedience, and he had numerous followers who were called "the Poor Ones of Lyon". Slowly they broke away from the Catholic Church. They rejected the Catholic doctrine and practice of sacraments which for them was purely magical and mechanical. Rome condemned these Sects, and gradually they disappeared except the presence of a small Waldensian Church in Northern Italy.

(ii) The Bohemian or Moravian Brethren

During the 14th and 15th centuries several intellectuals and theologians strongly criticized the authorities of the Catholic Church for their power, corruption and worldly lives. John Wycliffe (1328-84) from England and John Hus (1369-1415) from Bohemia were two of them. John Wycliffe was highly influential at the University of Oxford where John Hus was one of his disciples. Wycliffe wanted a reform on the basis of Scriptures, and he was the first to translate the Bible into English language. He held that all Christians must directly know the Word of God from the Bible and with this they have to critically evaluate the teachings of the Popes. The Church is a community of the elect or predestined; hence it is essentially invisible and its head is Jesus Christ alone and not the Pope.

Following the teachings of Wycliffe, John Hus attacked the corrupt practices of the Papacy and clergy and organized "ideal" Christian communities. Both Wycliffe and Hus were excommunicated and Hus was burnt at the stake. But the Hussite Movement spread in Bohemia and they were called Bohemian Brethren or Moravian Brethren. In the 18th century some colonies of these Brethren migrated to the North-West part of Germany. They share everything in common like the early Christians, and they practise the Lord's Supper preceded by an "agape meal". They continue the threefold ministry of Bishops, Presbyters and Deacons. Their life is marked by deep piety and great joy. The forerunners of today's "Brethren" are these Hussites.

(iii) Anabaptists and the Mennonites

Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) was a very radical reformer and was a contemporary of Martin Luther and John Calvin. In the doctrine of the Eucharist Zwingli radically differed from Luther and Calvin. He rejected the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist which for him was only a memorial service of thanksgiving. The Bread does not really become the Body of Christ. Luther and Calvin opposed Zwingli and he was killed in a battle. Zwingli and his party influenced the creation of some radical groups of Protestants who were called *the Anabaptists which meant "re-baptizers"*. They did not believe in infant baptism as children are incapable of professing their faith. Hence only adult baptism is valid. Hence those who were baptized as infants must be re-baptized when they become adults. The Anabaptist move-

ment spread fast in Switzerland, Germany and Holland. Some of these preached an Apocalyptic Christianity and they took to arms for exterminating the "ungodly". Both the Catholics and the Protestants persecuted them, and they gradually disappeared, except a small group called "the Mennonites" who originated from one Simon Menno (1496-1561) who was one of their leaders in Holland. They have small communities today in different parts of the world.

(iv) The Baptists

Baptists are today one of the major Protestant groups who originated in England in the 17th century in the Puritan background, though they might claim to have their origins from the Anabaptist movement. When the Puritans were persecuted in England many of them took refuge in Europe, especially in Holland. John Smith (1554-1612) and Thomas Helwys (1550-1616) were the leaders of the new movement and they were in Holland as refugees. When the climate became ripe in England they returned and started Baptist Congregations. They are called Baptists due to their specific doctrine of Baptism. Like the Anabaptists they rejected infant Baptism and insisted on adult baptism by immersion as the only valid form. There are several groups among the Baptists basing on their differences with regard to the doctrine of predestination, such as, General Baptists, Particular Baptists etc. American and British Baptists are the most powerful ones. In the North-East States of India the Baptists are the vast majority and their origins are from the American Baptists. They are organized on complete democratic lines, and with the emphasis on the principle of religious freedom for which they had always stood. Infant Baptism infringes upon the freedom of the child. They practice the two sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist and they have ordained ministers, but not the Episcopal system. The total number of all the Baptist groups may be more than 50 million.⁷

(v) Congregational Churches

Another important group formed under the Puritan influence is the Congregational Churches which came into existence in

7 For the statistical data of the different Christian Denominations and Sects, see, David B. Barrett (ed.), *World Christian Encyclopedia*, Nairobi: Oxford University, 1982. The statistics of 92 largest Christian traditions, another of 156 different Christian groups are given here (Table 9 and Table 27).

England between 1580 and 1590 under the leadership of Robert Browne, John Greenwood and Henry Barrow. They were led by the Congregational idea of the Church. The Church is a freely gathered community in a particular place. Each Congregation is self-governing and independent. In the earlier days they were known as "Independency" or "Independents". The Congregation is free to choose its ministers, and to form its liturgies, prayers etc. A group of Congregationalists migrated to North America in 1620, and they are the founders of Harvard and Yale Universities. They have ordained pastors without the Episcopal system, and they practise the two sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, and mention the real and spiritual presence of Christ in the Eucharist. They are not very numerous, and many of them have merged into the United Churches.

(vi) Quakers or The Society of Friends

Quakers had their origin in England in the middle of the 17th century when Puritanism reached its climax. They repudiated all ecclesiastical institutions and called themselves as "Seekers" who expected a new prophet to be sent by the Holy Spirit. George Fox (1624-1691) emerged as their leader. He had a conversion and became an itinerant preacher, announcing the gospel of "the inner light". For them to be a Christian meant to possess the inner light and thus to be born again in the Holy Spirit. This group attacked all the organized Churches, the practice of the sacraments and even the absolute authority of the Scriptures. The only authority is the inner light, which is the Holy Spirit and nothing else. The Quakers are well known in their fight for the humanitarian causes. They got the nickname Quakers, probably from the phenomenon of quaking or shivering during their prayer sessions. They reject ordained ministries as well as the practice of all sacraments. What they have is only silent meetings which they call "Waiting upon the Light". They witness to the freedom of the Spirit and personal inner experience which is the essence of religion.

(vii) The Methodists

The Methodist Church emerged from a revivalism within the Anglican church led by John Wesley (1703-1791) who

was a fellow at Lincoln College, Oxford. At Oxford Wesley and some of his friends formed a Holy Club and led a very strict and methodical life that they got the nickname "Methodists". On his way to America as an Anglican missionary Wesley became acquainted with the Moravian Brethren and was deeply influenced by them. Back in England Wesley had a spiritual conversion in 1738, and he went around preaching a revival and founded several Methodist Societies or Associations which became a separate Church after Wesley's death. Methodism rapidly spread in the Americas and many of the English speaking countries. Some methodist Churches became Episcopal where as others followed non-Episcopal form of ministry. Sanctity of believers (Methodist Holiness), strict and rigorous life and spontaneous prayers in liturgy are some of their characteristics. Following the practice of the Moravian Brethren they also adopted the Agape meals or "the love feasts". Many of the Methodists have entered the United Protestant Churches like the Church of South India. The Methodists around the world may be about 40 million.

(viii) The Disciples of Christ

The idea of One Ecumenical Church based on the New Testament Christianity was preached in North America by two Irish Presbyterian (Calvinist) pastors, Thomas Campbell (1763-1854) and his son, Alexander Campbell (1788-1866). It was a call for Church unity on the basis of the fundamentals such as, adult Baptism, Bible as the sole authority and faith in Christ. This movement brought together many from the Presbyterian and Baptist circles. But later the movement became a separate Church. They are also known as the "Churches of Christ". They are a small group present in the English speaking world.

(ix) The Old Catholics

They are a group separated from the Roman Catholic Church immediately after the First Vatican Council in 1870. Led by Ignaz von Doellinger who was professor of Church History in the University of Muenich, Germany, they rejected the First Vatican's definition on Papal Infallibility. In 1872 they held a Congress in Koeln, Germany, and organized them-

selves under the name, the Old Catholic Church. They maintained all Catholic teachings, practices, and ministries; but later they accepted some of the Protestant teachings and customs. They are a very small group mainly in Germany and Holland.

We have briefly described above the various Christian denominations and sects other than the mainline Churches which had emerged in the context of the Protestant Reformation and the Puritan movement in England. Familiarity with these religious groups and movements is a necessary prerequisite for understanding the new Christian sects and movements of our time.

The New Christian Sects and Movements

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed a third wave of Christian Sects and movements. The majority of these new sects originated in the western world, especially in the United States of America in the new climate of total individual freedom and the daring for new experimentations. Dissatisfaction with the scientific and secular culture and the immobility of the established mainline Churches which could not adequately respond to the needs and problems of the time and craving for new experience, security and peace of mind in life have caused the emergence of the new sects. There are several hundreds of such new Sects and Movements and they are everywhere in all countries and peoples. They multiply very fast under different names and under different leaders. I shall try to introduce briefly here some of the most popular Christian Sects and Movements highlighting their main characteristics and specific emphasis. I am unable to make any serious analysis of their actual historical, cultural, socio-economic, psychological and political contexts. Moreover, a critical evaluation of these Sects and Movements is beyond the scope of this article.

(i) The Holy Catholic-Apostolic Church

This sect has its beginning in England and Scotland in the early 1930s, and it resulted from a revivalism among the Anglican circles. Prayer circles were formed for a new out-

pouring of the Holy Spirit led by Henry Drummond, Edward Irving (after him the group was sometimes called "Irvingites") and others. In these prayer groups they began to experience the gifts of prophecy, gift of tongues and other signs given in the primitive Apostolic age. They began to develop also a strong conviction about the immediate Second Coming of Christ who would establish a thousand-year reign of peace. As a preparation for this they wanted to re-establish the Apostolic structure and ministry of the Early Church. In 1935 they completed the choosing of the 12 Apostles as successors of the earliest Apostles and they were assigned definite regions and countries for their new mission. Hence this Sect was called "Catholic Apostolic Community or Church". This group thus combined in it the Catholic, charismatic and Apocalyptic or Adventist elements. They claimed that they are "the restored primitive Church of the last days". With the death of the last of their Apostles in 1901 there was a crisis as the Second Coming of Christ did not occur and there was a debate whether they should appoint new Apostles. This led to the formation of "The New Apostolic Church" in North Germany where they began to appoint new Apostles and a revival took place with a Protestant spirit. There are various groups of these "Apostolic Sects" today in different parts of the world and they may be a little more than two million.

(ii) Brethren

The origin of the Brethren was in Dublin (Ireland) and in Plymouth (They are also therefore known as Plymouth Brethren) in England in the prayer meetings of 1920s with a desire for simplicity in Christian fellowship over against the institutional and authoritarian structures of the Church of England. They are distinct from the Moravian Brethren whom we have described above. By 1833 John Nelson Darby became their leader, and hence they were also known as "Darbyites. Darby was caught up with the apocalyptic fervour expecting the immediate Second Coming of Christ, and he wanted to unite people of all denominations to wait the return of the Lord. But gradually they became a separate group with pietistic, fundamentalistic and Adventist outlook. They practise

adult Baptism and the Lord's Supper which can be presided by any member of the community and not by any ordained minister. Among them there are many divisions, and the most important ones are "Open Brethren" and "Exclusive Brethren" the former having openness and relationship with other Christians and the latter having no relationship with them. From 1833 onwards several of their missionaries came to India, especially in Bihar, Andhra, Tamilnadu, Karnataka and Kerala and started the Brethren Communities. Their total number in the world may be around two million. The Brethren in North India joined with the united "Church of North India."

(iii) Salvation Army

The Salvation Army has its origins in a revivalism that took place in the Methodist Churches in England during the second half of the 19th century. William Booth (1829-1912) who was a Methodist pastor and his wife Catherine Mumford (1829-1890) were the leaders of this revivalist movement. They started their mission work among the poor Christians in the slums of London. They had to break away from the Methodist Churches in order to safeguard their freedom of preaching everywhere in England, and they began to start separate communities as "an Army to carry the witness to the blood of Christ and the fire of the Holy Spirit". They organized these new communities on military lines with uniform, military flags, martial music, military titles and ranks and strict discipline. Hence they are known as Salvation Army. The ranks of the leaders or officers are as follows: At the top is the General and then under him or her Commissioners, Colonels, Lieut-Colonel, Major, Captain and Lieutenant. The movement spread rapidly during 1880-1910 under its charismatic and enigmatic founder William Booth. In the Army they have perfect equality of men and women that women assume all ranks of officers including the top post of General. They do not practice the sacraments as they find the sacraments superfluous for those who are already born again and transformed by the Spirit. Their worship is in the form of prayer meetings and witness for revival and sanctification. They are well known for their charitable works especially among socially backward classes. They exist today in 89 countries and they have a total of about 5 million members.

(iv) The Pentecostal Movement

The Pentecostal Movement is one of the most significant religious movements of our times. It is an ecstatic, revivalist and spiritual movement with emphasis on a second conversion or Baptism by the Holy Spirit accompanied with the gifts of tongues (glossolalia), faith-healing and the gift of prophecy. This movement has no one founder. Its beginnings can be traced to the revivalist prayer meetings in Wales in England and in Los Angeles in the United States at the turn of the 20th century. Among the leaders three names may be mentioned: The American Baptist preacher Joseph Smale who visited Wales and participated in those revivalist prayer meetings and received the Baptism by the Spirit and returned to Los Angeles with the conviction that a New Pentecost has come; Charles Parham who conducted a special Bible School at Topeka in Kansas where in 1901 one of his students, an eighteen year girl, was baptized in the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues; W. J. Seymour, a negro preacher who had ecstatic powers and joined with Joseph Smale and in their prayer meeting in 1906 an eight year negro boy was found speaking in tongues.

From Wales and Los Angeles the movement began to spread all over the United States and England and from there into different parts of the world. Each leader and missionary began to found new communities under different names, and thus several Pentecostal Churches were born. "Assemblies of God" is one of the most popular and biggest groups in the United States. There are others like "Elim Foursquare Gospel Alliance" (This name has reference to their four basic doctrines of the Gospel-sanctification in the sense of perfectionism, baptism of the Spirit, the charism of healing by prayer and faith, and the immediate return of Christ to inaugurate the Millennium or Thousand Years Reign), "Churches of God", "Christian Union", "United Pentecostal Church", "Calvary Pentecostal Church", "Emmanuel Holiness Church", "Pentecostal Assemblies of the World", "Pentecostal Church, of God of America" and many others. "Indian Pentecostal Church", "Ceylon Pentecostal Church", "India Full Gospel Church", "Sharon Church", etc. are some of the Pentecostal

groups in India.⁸ The Pentecostal Churches are today a fast growing group in several countries, especially in Latin America, Africa, South Korea and in many other countries. They may be around 70 million today.

The Pentecostal witness and their experience that it is possible today to be baptized or filled with the Holy Spirit as on the day of Pentecost appears very powerful. They believe only in the local Churches. For them any organization beyond the local is unbiblical and therefore unacceptable. They practise adult Baptism and Holy Communion, and they are Congregational in Church structure, i. e., they safeguard the autonomy of the local congregation which elects or appoints its ministers or pastors. They consider Bible as the sole authority and in their approach to the Bible they are fundamentalistic. Whatever might be the extremes of the Pentecostal Movement, it is an undeniable fact that it has highly influenced all other Churches as seen in the "Charismatic Movement" which has cut across all the Christian Churches today.

(v) Seventh Day Adventists

The Seventh Day Adventists originated in North America between 1830-1840 as part of a universal Apocalyptic revival movement. Its founder was a New England farmer William Miller (1782-1849). He had an experience of conversion at the age of 34, and thereafter he began to make an intensive study of the Bible, especially the Apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation and became convinced of the immediate Second Coming of Christ. The coming of Christ will be followed by the first resurrection of the believers and the establishment of a thousand years reign by Christ which will be the Kingdom of God on earth. Miller who was originally a Baptist preacher went around and preached the immediate Second Coming of Christ especially among the Baptist, Congregationalist and Methodist circles and told the hearers to remain in their own Churches until the arrival of the Lord when all the barriers

8. For the details about the different Pentecostal Churches, see, Konrad Aigermissen, op. cit., pp. 102-114. For information about the Pentecostal Churches in India, especially in Kerala, see, E. J. Chacko Some Free Churches in Kerala, (in Malayalam), Thiruvalla, Kerala, 1986.

among the Churches will disappear. As the Second Coming of Christ did not take place, Miller confessed that he had made a mistake in attempting to calculate the date of the Lord's return. Gradually Miller and his followers were forced to set up their own community and organization as they were expelled from the other Churches. Later several divisions happened among them due to their doctrinal differences. They are now in all parts of the world and may be around 7-8 million.

They are called Seventh Day Adventists as they observe the Sabbath very strictly in the spirit of the Old Testament and on the seventh day, i.e., on Saturday. In ministry and community organization they are like the Congregationalists, in adult Baptism they are like the Baptists and in doctrines they are closer to the Calvinists, but with a strong apocalyptic tendency. According to them human soul is not intrinsically immortal, but immortality is granted by Christ and only to the believers. They are puritanical in their life and they follow some of the Old Testament traditions with regard to their diet. They practise Holy Communion after the washing of the feet. Their specific apostolate is public health programmes, and every member has to give tithes for the maintenance of the community. They seem to be closer to the early Jewish Christianity.

(vi) The Mormons or Latter Day Saints

The Mormons or "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints" is another Christian sect from America founded by Joseph Smith (1805-1844) who claimed to have private revelations. According to him, Jesus immediately after his resurrection went to America and preached to the primitive people there and started a Church. According to Joseph Smith, the angel Moroni appeared to him in 1823 and informed him that he is called to re-establish the Church of Jesus Christ in the last days of the world. He also claimed that he discovered certain gold plates with inscriptions about the history of the earliest Church which Christ founded in America and their Sacred Scriptures which he claimed to have translated in 1830 as 'The Book of Mormon'. Smith taught that it was Mormon and his son Moroni who originally recorded

these Scriptures and buried them in the ground before the extermination of the earliest Church in America. He claimed thus that he was called to restore the pure and earliest form of Christianity. Many people believed in him and they formed a separate Church in New York. As they began to practise polygamy, they were persecuted and therefore they moved westward and finally settled in the present Utah State and founded Salt Lake City which became their headquarters. Before reaching their promised land of Utah, Joseph Smith was killed by his enemies and the leadership went to Brigham Young (1801-1877) who was an excellent organizer who consolidated the Mormons and their State, Utah. In 1893 they had to suppress the practice of polygamy as it was set to be a precondition for accepting them in the North American Union.

Today the majority of the people of the State of Utah are Mormons who are a special people belonging to a peculiar religion with certain mystery rituals performed in their temple which is closed to the non-members. Their authority is the Bible and the Book of Mormon. They believe in Christ and his prophet Joseph Smith.

(vii) Christian Scientists

This American sect is very close to the early Christian Gnostics. The emphasis is on right knowledge which can totally liberate humans. The fundamental error or sin is the belief that matter or body is real. The gateway for liberation from sin, illness, pain and death is the realization that they are all illusions. Prayer, concentration of the mind and faith in Jesus who is the great teacher of this knowledge are the ways to remove our illusions. These and similar teachings were of Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910) who is the founder of this sect. She was a visionary and was a very ill person, and medical science could not help her. With the help of a hypnotist, Phineas Quimby, she was completely cured by means of hypnotism and spiritualism. Later she began to teach the spiritual method of healing and developed a philosophical and religious system in her book, 'Science and Health with a Key to the Scriptures', which together with the Bible became the authority of the movement. In 1879 she along with her followers

started a new Church called, "The Church of Christ, Scientist". Their daily, 'The Christian Science Monitor' is very popular in the U. S. They practise no sacraments, and their Sunday service consists of singing, readings and testimonies. Their total membership may be around two million.

(viii) Jehovah's Witnesses

It is an Adventist Sect in America founded by Charls T. Russel (1852-1916) who was a Calvinist and business man. Driven by the Apocalyptic ideas, he began to study the Bible and spread his ideas through his books and periodicals. Millions of copies of his books were distributed and in 1881 he founded "The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society". He broke away from his Church and started a new community. Russel and his successor J. F. Rutherford (1869-1942) had set several dates, one after the other, for the return of Christ and the coming of the Kingdom. Finally Rutherford said that the Kingdom has already come in the community of Jehovah's Witnesses and the resurrection of the dead will take place before the end of the century. They have the headquarters in Brooklyn, New York, and they propagate their doctrines and ideas mainly through their publications and broadcasting stations. Among their members there are two categories, "pioneers" who are full-time workers for the Sect and "publishers" who are ordinary members who spend some time for selling their publications. This Sect does not believe in the Trinity, but in Jehovah of the Old Testament and they reject the immortality of the soul. They do not believe in the full divinity of Jesus Christ who is for them only a creature, often identified with Archangel Michael. Jesus became the Messiah after his Baptism in Jordan. They practise adult Baptism and Holy Communion once a year at Easter which is for them a memorial supper. They are extremely otherworldly, pessimistic, puritanical and fundamentalistic in their approach to the Bible.

(ix) The Unitarians and the Unification Church

The Unitarians reject the doctrine of the Trinity, as did the early Ebionites, Arians and others, with the consequence of reducing Christ to a mere human being. Groups of the Unitarians were always there on the left wing of the Reformation,

The first Unitarian Church came into existence in Poland in 1565. According to them God is One, Christ, the Son of God was a created being, and the Holy Spirit is not God, but the gift of God. The movement spread in England in the 17th century, and its official journal is the 'Hibbert Journal'. At the beginning of the 19th century the movement came to America and became popular as it was liberal, optimistic, undogmatic, open and ecumenical, and it was regarded as the Church of the intellectuals. In 1805 the Unitarians took control of the University of Harvard and influenced the academic community. They presented Jesus as the realization of the ideals of humankind, a shining example who could raise humans to his own sublime level.

The Unification Church founded by Sun Myung Moon in South Korea in 1954 and became very popular in the United States today may be classified as a Unitarian Church. Moon has also established several institutions and movements for World Peace and Interreligious Dialogue. The context of the Unification Church was Moon's total war against the atheistic communism. For Moon Jesus is a perfect man sent by God for the redemption of mankind and the world today awaits him as the Lord of the Second Advent to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. The Trinitarian doctrine is rejected by Moon. For him America is the New Rome providentially designed to be an instrument for the New Messiah to establish the New Kingdom.

Conclusion

This brief historical introduction on some of the most important Free Churches, Sects and Movements may help us to identify the common characteristics of Christian Sects. I would like to reconstruct a Christian Sect as follows: A Christian Sect is one where Jesus Christ has a significant place and role. The traditional norm of Christian Orthodoxy is the confession of Christ as fully God and fully man. In the Christian Sects often either the fullness of his divinity or that of his humanity is in question. Every Sect begins with an extra-ordinary person, a prophet and genius, who is at its centre, his or her visions, experiences, revelations, doctrines and teachings give meaning to his or her disciples.

Most of the New Christian Sects have their origins in the United States, in a climate of total freedom, capitalistic domination and religious revivalism for meaning and new experience. The Free Churches of the post-Reformation period with their puritanical, pietistic, charismatic and apocalyptic characteristics often provided a framework to the new sects. Dissatisfaction with the existing society and culture and with the traditional mainline Christianity which lacked lustre, experience and mystery inspired the search for new ways. A strong pessimism about the present situation of the world called for the Apocalyptic and Adventist visions of many Sects. People disgusted with the extreme individualism of our times began to search for community and deeper communion and in the Sects they found an answer. What people wanted in the New Sects is mental peace, freedom, security, and spiritual experience, especially experience of the power of the Holy Spirit. In the midst of the confusing and ambiguous religious pluralism of our time many people looked for certainty and absolute truth in the New Sects which could provide them a firm ground and clear direction. All these dimensions, perspectives and characteristics may not be present in all the Sects in the same proportions. However some of them or many of them are there in every Sect.

We have already mentioned that for a comprehensive understanding and explanation of the New Christian Sects we have to examine them seriously in their actual historical, social, cultural, economical, political, psychological and religious contexts. Any outright and hasty condemnation of them as aberrations will be unwise and wrong. The new Christian Sects are challenges and opportunities for the traditional Christian Churches which are in need of radical changes in order that they may become relevant and meaningful for today. The lessons we can learn from the New Christian Sects are much more important than the threats they make or the handicaps and defects they have. A critical evaluation of these New Christian Sects is outside the purview of this article. Their fundamentalism, sectarianism, and lack of ecumenical and interreligious openings are indeed serious dangers.

A Statement on Alternative Ministry

at a Colloquium by C P C I & I S I Bangalore

I. Introduction

1. The context of our coming together for a shared reflection on our experience in alternative ministry may be described as follows:

2. Many of us in church ministry have for a long time been feeling unsure of the adequacy and relevance of the ministries traditionally engaged in by church personnel. We have been searching, seriously and at personal cost, for socially meaningful and relevant forms of service to the people.

3. The search has led some of us to initiate a number of innovative services at various levels of society. Some of the more significant departures from traditional understanding and praxis of church ministry may be mentioned here:

- New and people-centred pastoral service in the church milieu;
- Intervention in social, economic and political issues in favour of the poor and oppressed sectors of our nation;
- Collaboration with social Action Groups working for change in social policies;
- Alignment with political groups demanding radical changes in social structures.

4. In many cases such initiatives met with opposition and resistance both from the ecclesiastical hierarchy and from dominant groups and power-structures of society. Church authorities resort to disciplinary measures ranging from suspension of our ministerial role in the community to various forms of harassment and denial of simple human rights of self-defence. They acted in the name of discipline and doctrine, while the ministers with a new orientation justified their involvement as an obvious demand of the Gospel which Jesus

addressed to the poor. The christian community, perplexed and confused, has been mostly silent. To many the intervention of religious personnel in the secular, socio-political spheres seemed strange and incongruent with religious ministry. People with secular concerns viewed our new commitments from a different angle. What specific value-dimension, they ask us, are you bringing in to justify your entry into the socio-political field in the name of your religious commitment?

5. The experience of many years of involvement, as well as of its impact on society, on the church and on ourselves needed to be reflected upon. We needed clarity and reassurance, and a finer focussing on ourselves and our work in the light of our shared experience.

II. Our Experience

6. Departure from traditional modes of ministry was prompted by our desire to deepen the sacramental ministry. The healing effect of the ministry does include socio-political transformation along with conversion of hearts. It turns us to God and to one another. It educates us to meet God in the neighbour and the neighbour in God. These holistic possibilities are now blocked by the Church's present praxis, inhibited as she is by her own ambiguities and class alignments.

7. Sacramental ministrations and Christian spirituality have become cult-specific, individualistic, anaemic. Their transformative potential in the socio-political realm is at present practically negated. It is this deplorable alienation of the ministry that necessitates a deeper, fuller understanding of the sacraments and alternative celebrations.

8. Church authority's opposition to the recovery of the fuller dimensions of Church ministry has often been very strong. In general the hierarchy is fiercely hostile. Church structures have at times bared their repressive nature. Some bishops even sought to prevent the entry of social-activist priest and religious by applying their power of territorial jurisdiction! In certain cases the hostility was so strong that some activists decided to ignore the "church" in order to devote their energies to the service of the people rather than waste them in

confrontation with ecclesiastical authorities and social insensitivities. They have been working independently of church linkages and collaborating with secular movements with larger outreach and mass-based programmes for social transformation.

9. The ecological question has come to assume great importance against the new development policies adopted by governments, the license granted to private initiatives and the emergence of (a new sensitivity to) earth-spirituality and earth-theology.

10. Women have tremendous potential for effecting social change. Women power has become a reality. It is keenly felt in local and regional issues. It is a learning process to work with and for women, tribals and dalits. Remarkable changes have been witnessed among the silent masses during the last few years. The powers that be have now to reckon with people's power and people's wisdom.

11. Almost all who shared their experiences highlighted the emerging sense of hope, and a firm commitment to change in the direction of community, equality, participation, freedom and responsibility.

III. We Believe...

12. Any and every effort to restore or enhance human dignity, to uphold human rights and promote the liberation of the oppressed is God's work; it is spiritual, evangelical ministry.

13. Any service that contributes to the ushering in and showing forth of God's Reign is Christian ministry.

14. What is authentically human is truly divine. We reject all dualism and dichotomy of soul and body, heaven and earth, the spiritual and the material, the eternal and the temporal, the religious and the secular, the sacred and the profane. It is in creation, history and people and life on this earth that God comes to meet us.

15. Liberation and love, justice and community are the heart of religious/christian experience. The sacraments are symbolic presentations and occasional celebrations of these abiding, vital realities. Ministries which fail to highlight and actualize these realities cannot be genuinely christian or truly religious.

16. People's struggles for dignity and solidarity are multi-dimensional; they are at one and the same time social and spiritual, political and theological. Christian spirituality and ritual celebrations should embody the struggles waged at political and social levels. Otherwise they would be failing to witness to Christ and His Gospel.
17. Participatory involvement in such struggles is inclusive, going as it does beyond the confines of caste, races, nationalities and gender distinctions. It is therefore a ministry of the Reign of God for which the Church exists.
18. Empowerment of the people is the outcome of the struggle. This end should be reflected in the process itself. Leadership of the people and democracy in decision-making are essential requirements of people's struggles.
19. Hostility of the powers that be is often a sign and measure of the effectiveness of the struggle. Perseverance in the struggle and courage in the face of opposition from the mighty is a sign of God's presence on the side of the people. Priesthood makes sense when we are solidary with the people, and solidarity imparts strength to the struggle.
20. People judge a minister's participation in struggle in terms of his/her loyalty and to steadfastness in the cause of the oppressed, and the political stand he/she takes.
21. When church structures resemble those of the oppressive State, and church authorities become allies of the state, every effort is seen to be made in the direction of careful avoidance of the Cross of Christ.
22. All citizens have a right to live and work anywhere in the country and serve the people, subject to the just laws of the land. In social and political engagement in the cause of the people, the application of territorial jurisdiction by church authority is irrelevant.
23. Effective service to people's liberation requires that our work be informed with an adequate analysis of the social situation, an assessment of the forces at work, and of the various possibilities. Required also is periodic critical evaluation of the work done.
24. The struggle needs to be informed with a vision of the Future, the coming of New Heaven and New Earth. We should not fail to reveal the depth dimensions of socio-political realities, to refer them to the ultimate horizons of life, and reflect its light on them. This will endow the struggles with substance, strength and direction and enable them to avoid the opportunism and shallowness characteristic of ideologies. The depth realities and ultimate horizons can serve as criteria for critical evaluation of the struggle and its processes.
25. The global sway capitalism is gaining now is going to make liberation struggles more hazardous and more urgent. This modern

imperialism of Mammon calls for total resistance from the ministers of God's Reign in solidarity with all who fight for human dignity and democratic fellowship.

IV. We Need More Clarity ...

26. The question of power, especially of political power, and its use in liberating people seems to lack clarity for quite a number of activist ministers. Behind the difficulty lurk the ideological differences that exist among us.

27. How is one to discern and fathom the mystery of the Church of the Crucified Son of Man in a church that lives in happy alliance with the crucifiers of the poor?

28. The violation of human rights within the church and its tolerance by the community leaves the activists wholly stranded. What are his options?

29. Are we to despair of democracy in church structures while the mystery of the church calls for equality and fellowship?

V. Sociological Factors

30. The New Economic Policy of the Government of India is oriented to the empowerment of the Powerful of today and further enrichment of the Rich. It can lead only to greater marginalisation of the people.

31. Democratic process is getting weakened; the political process is manipulated by money power and lumpenisation.

32. The invasion of the Capitalist culture — the culture of consumerism — has become the greatest threat to the humanist traditions and values of our people.

33. Women, children, Adivasis, Dalits, Landless labourers, the displaced victims of development are the most vulnerable sections today.

34. There are however many courageous struggles springing up all over the country and raising hopes among the people.

VI. Theological Grounds

35. The earthly and the secular are of vital importance to human and our ultimate destiny. This is the place of revelation, grace, and decisive encounter with God. It is here God in Christ meets us. Jesus places the earth significantly at the heart of the prayer he taught us. Creation and redemption/salvation belong together.

36. Jesus' proclamation of the Good News is accompanied by services of healing, and feeding and liberating from oppressive powers, ideologies and structures. It is in these services that the Reign of God which was the core of his proclamation was embodied, illustrated and brought within the range of human

experience. These services were sacraments of the Reign of God. We must continue their celebration.

37. The Kingdom of God which frames our life and work is justice, mercy, freedom, and fellowship; it is health and food and forgiveness for all women and men. It is within people's experience of these blessings that the news of the Kingdom of God becomes credible.

38. Jesus knew that he was anointed and sent to bring the good news to the poor, to give sight to the blindfolded, to open prisons and let captives go, and to set the downtrodden free. This work of his must be understood in all its amplitude as encompassing the personal and social, the religious and the secular. The call of the church is to continue this liberating ministry of Jesus. It is in the measure that we do this we become his Church, and the Sacrament of the Kingdom. Evangelization then is bound up with participation in the struggles of the poor for life and dignity.

39. The emergence of the liberating community is made manifest in the sharing of earthly goods, in common struggles and in martyrdom. The style of life and culture shaped by the Spirit and the memory of Jesus, is marked, as Acts 2 and 4 tell us, by sharing of faith and prayer, sharing of food and wealth, and the breaking of the Eucharistic bread. The early church is defined in terms of community of goods and faith and love. The Eucharist is the Sacrament or symbol, expression, celebration and promotion of that unity and community. It is an education and exercise in egalitarian social living, a promise to shape up after the pattern of the Triune God, the Ultimate Reality of Shared Existence.

40. It is in this mystery of the Triune God that our Faith-Baptism immerses us. We are baptized/immersed into the Name/Reality of the Father-Son-Spirit. Baptism is far more than a water-ritual. We are called by Jesus to receive the Baptism with which he was baptized. His baptism was his commitment to and immersion in the cause of the Kingdom of God which is the cause of the people of God, together with his readiness to give everything, life included, for this cause. How he was under strain till that Baptism was accomplished. His challenging question keeps resounding even today: Are you ready for the Baptism with which I am to be baptized? (Mk 10: 35-45; Lk 12: 49-50). Let us not trivialize Baptism any more, but live immersed in the Great Cause and pay the price in pain and death if need be.

41. We remember Jesus' dalit death and dalit birth, and his life with nowhere to lay his head. We recognise him today in the millions of the dispossessed and the dishonoured of our land, our world. And we know that to feed them with some rice and to clothe them with honour is to feed and clothe Jesus Christ.

VII. Conclusion

1. We resolve to be solidary with one another and with movements and organisations in struggle for justice.
2. We appeal to the Church Hierarchy and other authorities to re-examine their non-committal/anti-people positions, adhere to the Gospel criteria of witnessing to the Kingdom, withdraw the repressive measures against activist ministers/religious, engage them in sincere dialogue and courageously support the people's struggles for life, dignity and solidarity.
3. We call upon Christian thinkers to articulate creatively and forcefully the socio-political imperatives of the evangelising process, to integrate the dimension of the struggle for liberation in the Christian ritual celebrations. We invite them to bring out with force and authority, the spiritual and theological dimensions of Christian's secular engagements.

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